

# **Shaping, Intertextuality and Summation in D.H. Lawrence's *Last Poems***

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## Abstract

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This thesis, entitled 'Shaping, Intertextuality and Summation in D.H. Lawrence's *Last Poems*', is the first full-length study of the poetry written by Lawrence in 1928-30, posthumously labelled 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems' by Richard Aldington in 1932. My opening chapter discusses the characteristics of these two late poetry notebooks, challenging interpretations offered by Holly Laird and Christopher Pollnitz. I argue for the necessity of moving beyond an analysis limited to the consideration of poem sequences within a verse-book, or the evolution of individual poems through draft-stages. This conviction provokes a discussion of intertextual theory, in order to establish an approach which will facilitate the placing of Lawrence's late poetry in wider contexts. The resulting methodology aims to combine an empirical selection procedure in which intertexts are chosen according to key triggers or signposts within Lawrence-text, with an awareness that such selection is arbitrary, constituting an inevitable retrospective ordering.

Chapters 2-7 each focus on a specific text, area or genre in which significant intertextual assimilation is identified. In chapters 2 and 3, four crucial poetic precursors - Keats, Shelley, Swinburne and Whitman - are discussed, both in relation to Lawrence's blatant allusions, and in terms of the insidious 'weaving' of precursive text into *Last Poems*. Chapter 4, emphasising that intertextuality should be recognised as spanning genre divisions, focuses on the significance of the pre-Socratic fragments published in John Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*. Chapter 5, also foregrounding prose intertexts, discusses three relevant anthropological works: E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Gilbert Murray's *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, in relation to the poems advocating a conscious 'return' to different modes of writing and living. In Chapter 6 the term 'intra-textuality' (self-borrowing) is introduced, with *Sketches of Etruscan Places* as the focus. Lawrence's writing (in addition to his wide reading) on the Etruscan civilisation is seen to underlie fundamental mythological aspects of *Last Poems*. Intra-textuality remains the focus of Chapter 7, which discusses *Apocalypse* (the only major work written by Lawrence after *Last Poems*) as well as numerous related intertexts, in order to illuminate Lawrence's use of key apocalyptic symbols in the late poetry.

The concluding chapter considers whether or not the posthumously imposed title *Last Poems* is appropriate, and whether this 'body' of verse can be treated justifiably as a summation of Lawrence's life and/or art. The short prologues to the 1930 edition of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, and the prose poem 'Fire', are brought into play as texts which succeed *Last Poems*, taking Lawrence's (free-verse) poetry writing in new directions. My interrogation of the concept of 'lastness' provokes a consideration of the implications of creative immortality and the possibility of different kinds of renewal, or 'fresh starts'.



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## Chapter 1 Introduction

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In 1932 Richard Aldington published an edition of two manuscript notebooks filled with poetry written by D.H. Lawrence, discovered after the writer's death. The material in the two notebooks was published in one volume under the title *Last Poems*, but Aldington categorised them separately as 'More Pansies'<sup>1</sup> and 'Last Poems',<sup>2</sup> according to his interpretation of their content.<sup>3</sup> The 'More Pansies' notebook (completely filled), which he described as a 'catch-all', is diverse in style and genre, ranging from poems under the heading 'Pensées' which continue the previous 'Pansies' style, to serious and contemplative death poems, including early drafts of 'Bavarian Gentians' and 'The Ship of Death'. The second notebook, entitled 'Last Poems' by Aldington (containing less poetry and not entirely filled), seems more unified, incorporating several mythological poems, philosophical and religious verse and later drafts of the death poems.

My concern is the 'shaping' process which determined the nature of the 'Last Poems' notebook, and the way in which the notebook may or may not be

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<sup>1</sup> Aldington's MSB or 'More Pansies' (Roberts E192); Pollnitz's 'Nettles notebook' in the impending variorum CUP edition of *Complete Poems*.

<sup>2</sup> Aldington's MSA or 'Last Poems' (Roberts E192).

<sup>3</sup> I will refer to Aldington's edition of the two notebooks as *Last Poems*, and to the notebooks themselves as 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems'. When quoting from the two manuscript notebooks I will use the abbreviations MS1 ('More Pansies') and MS2 ('Last Poems'). Where possible I will always quote from the MSS rather than from a printed edition, according to the following system. I have numbered each notebook from the first page on which poems in Lawrence's handwriting appear, allocating a number to each leaf (usually a double page of the notebook). I have not assigned a number to the pages on which Frieda's handwriting appears, unless Lawrence has written out a poem on the same leaf. In addition to the MS reference I will (unless referring to a draft which remains unpublished) give a reference relating either to Pinto and Roberts' *Complete Poems* (Lawrence, 1993a), or, in rare instances in which these editors miss a word or a significant punctuation mark, to Mara Kalnins' *Selected Poems* edition (Lawrence, 1992a). If any part of the MS is impossible to decipher, I derive the text from *Complete Poems*, but supply the manuscript reference in addition.

usefully considered as a summation or completion of Lawrence's life/art. Individual poems from this notebook - such as 'The Ship of Death' and 'Bavarian Gentians' - are often taken out of context and anthologised, or adopted individually as the subject of a scholarly article. (This approach seemingly adheres to the old New Critical emphasis on text - perceived as autonomous - rather than context.) There have also been more extended studies of the late poems within books covering the entire range of Lawrence's poetry (such as Sandra Gilbert's pioneering *Acts of Attention*; and Holly Laird's book *Self and Sequence* which I will discuss at length later on). Yet there has been no full-length study of the 'Last Poems' which has considered the notebook material as a collection of poems, and explored its status as only a potential 'book'.

My emphasis on the 'Last Poems' notebook as a collection results from my sense that poems are most productively analysed in their place or context, rather than in isolation. This is a development of the position adopted in Neil Fraistat's 1986 book *Poems in their Place*, whose focus is the collecting of poems, and the implications of this process both for poets themselves and for their readership. In the introduction to this volume, Fraistat argues that it is necessary to allow poems to remain in place, and that failure to do so results in significant losses:

Because reading is a process of patterning, to read an individual poem in isolation or outside of its original volume is not only to lose the large retroactive sweep of the book as a whole—with its attendant dynamics and significance—but also to risk losing the meanings within the poem itself that are foregrounded or activated by the context of the book. (Fraistat, 1986, p.8)

Fraistat - concerned with 'mapping the intricate angles of intersection among the poems in a book' (Fraistat, 1986, p.10) - employs the term 'contextual poetics' in order to describe the critical approach that responds to poems in their place(s). This methodology 'would study a wide range of forms, including paired poems, sonnet and other types of sequences, poetic works published in



parts..., individual collections—as well as clusters of poems within them, and the shape of a poet's canon' (Fraistat, 1986, p.4). In addition it might (via concepts of structure and theories of perception) discuss 'how the mind distinguishes between poetic parts and wholes' and 'how the position of poems within a particular book affects the reading process' (Fraistat, 1986, p.4). His claim to discuss the workings of the mind in relation to poetic structures may seem absurdly ambitious, extending his scope of enquiry beyond a practical and theoretical consideration of poems in their place to include psychological 'theories of perception'. Fraistat's book seems most useful to my purposes not in offering a psychological thesis, but in formulating the kind of 'contextual poetics' outlined in this summary:

[Contextual poetics] would, in short, be sensitive to the numerous ways that the context of the book affects interpretation and to the special theoretical problems that arise when the book becomes central to the interpretive process. And, finally, contextual poetics would develop its own history, tracing the evolution of various types of poetic collections and practices for assembling them, citing important historical models, and establishing—where possible—lines of influence.

(Fraistat, 1986, p.4)

Fraistat's methodology is concerned both with the process of composition that determines the nature of a collection, and with the way in which the ordering within the collection dictates or conditions a reader's response. It combines historical awareness with a preoccupation with the implications of interpretation.

Fraistat considers the position of the poet in relation to the poet's own collection and to the hypothesised readership of this work. He argues that poets are 'under no constraints to unify their collections, nor do they as a rule provide linear sequence or plot in their books' (Fraistat, 1986, p.8). The continuities within a book of poetry (he argues) are generally associative rather than causal, resulting often in striking incongruities and discontinuities. Nevertheless, the poet relies on a thoughtful reader to 'recognize the significance (or insignificance) of order in their volumes' (Fraistat, 1986, p.7).

The significance/insignificance dichotomy hints at the complexity entailed in the required reader-response: a 'mass of complex data' (Fraistat, 1986, p.10) challenges the reader to identify and articulate principles of structure and order. The reading of a collection rather than a single poem multiplies the demands placed on a reader: new speculations regarding order and unity/disunity are inevitably provoked. This notion of a challenge provokes slippery questions regarding authorial intention and the extent to which a poet conditions reader-response and imposes limits on a text. Fraistat argues that although a poet dictates the shape of a book s/he ought not to be allowed to dictate the meaning. For the 'meaning' never can be straightforward: it is problematised by 'a wealth of unconscious connections and fortuitous circumstances that contribute to the meaning of a contexture, just as they do to an individual text' (Fraistat, 1986, p.9). It seems to me that a poet will condition one/some response(s) to the book, but a multiplicity will subsequently be supplied by diverse readers, each supplying his/her own perspective.

Each reader-response will involve a retrospective ordering through imposing categories and patterns, in the interests of identifying some kind of satisfying coherence. This coherence will often adhere to a preconceived notion of unity, so the book is made to fit a predetermined shape, even if it is (wilfully or subconsciously) distorted in the process. Such considerations compel Annabel Patterson to ask the question: 'To what extent does the existence of authoritative and significant order in a volume depend on the predisposition of the reader to find it or to find it absent?' (Patterson, 1986, p.98). This is a question which I will address in considering the way in which notable Lawrence critics - such as Richard Aldington, Christopher Pollnitz and Holly Laird - have interpreted the interrelation between poems in the 'Last Poems' notebook. I will consider these late poems 'in their place', providing multiple contexts, including the drafting process through which the poems have been 'shaped' and 'reshaped', and the way in which 'Last Poems' relates to the precursive notebook 'More Pansies'. I will offer an alternative approach to the way in which Lawrence was working with and between these two last notebooks



(offering my own perception of poetic contexture); I will also suggest that an exploration of drafting as 'reshaping' provokes an awareness of textual complexity that propels the reader/critic outwards to wider linguistic concerns which can be explored through reference to theories of influence and intertextuality

*The two notebooks: Aldington's assumption, and another imposed division.*

When considering the nature and significance of Lawrence's 'Last Poems' notebook, it is essential to engage with the process of composition and revision that determined the nature of the embodied poems. The most obvious point of reference is the poetry notebook now believed to have been completed prior to the 'Last Poems' MS: the notebook referred to as 'More Pansies' by Aldington. It would be impossible to discuss Lawrence's late poetry without engaging with the critical debate surrounding the sequencing within the two notebooks, and consequently with the way in which the MSS may be considered to interrelate. It was originally assumed by Aldington that the two notebooks were composed simultaneously, and that 'More Pansies' served as a jotting-book from which certain poems were transcribed into the other book: an interpretation which suggests that Lawrence was selecting his best poems for inclusion in 'Last Poems'. However, Aldington also asserted that the two books remained distinct in content and preoccupation: they 'represent two different books, one a continuation of *Pansies*, the other a new series leading up to the death poems, for which Lawrence had not found a general title' (Aldington, 1993, p.592). This implies selection according to type rather than quality, but does not throw into question the simultaneity of the two books' composition.

This notion of simultaneous composition was challenged by Keith Sagar, and the challenge was substantiated by Christopher Pollnitz in his essay 'Cough-Prints and Other Intimacies: Considerations in Editing Lawrence's Later Verse':

Keith Sagar has proved erroneous Aldington's assumption that the *Nettles* and *Last Poems* notebooks were used contemporaneously, the one serving as 'a first jotting-book' from which Lawrence redrafted certain poems into the other. Sagar shows that the two notebooks were used sequentially: when the *Nettles* notebook was filled, Lawrence went on to the *Last Poems* notebook, which he left unfilled, and unfinished, at his death.<sup>4</sup> (Pollnitz, 1995, p.154)

If the two notebooks were consecutively rather than simultaneously created, it becomes impossible to argue for a clear-cut division according to type, style or subject-matter, in which Lawrence split his poetry into a collection continuing 'Pansies' (the 'More Pansies' notebook) and a collection that is serious, profound and contemplative (the 'Last Poems' book). Pollnitz challenges the approach that places a division between the two notebooks by arguing instead that a stylistic break ought to come before the last nine poems of the 'More Pansies' notebook. He refers to this break as an interestingly abrupt shift from epigrammatic 'pansy'-like verse to the mythopoeic death-poetry in Lawrence's penultimate poetry notebook. He asserts that:

The transition, from the scurrilous squibs of summer to the elevated autumnal mood of the nine poems which conclude the *Nettles* notebook, is as sudden as any to be found in the notebooks. For Sagar, the move from Lichtenthal and then Lawrence's ill-health in Rottach are sufficient to account for this change. (Pollnitz, 1995, p.165)

Pollnitz replaces a division separating one notebook from the other with a division that sections off the last nine poems in 'More Pansies' (*Nettles*) from the preceding verse, and gives a biographical explanation for this 'transition'. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the attempt to expand the 'autumnal' category so that it includes the last nine poems of the 'More Pansies' notebook creates a different, yet equally misleading, division.

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<sup>4</sup> Pollnitz refers to 'More Pansies' as the *Nettles* notebook, and also italicises 'Last Poems' which I always designate using quotation marks, so as to differentiate between unfinished manuscript notebook and published text.



Pollnitz's new division is placed between the untitled poem beginning 'Dearly-beloved Mr Squire' and 'Let there be Light!'. A consideration of the differences in tone and style between the ending of the former and the beginning of the latter is sufficient to explain why critical analysis has identified a distinct break at this point. The untitled poem (hitherto referred to as '[Mr Squire]' in the *Complete Poems*, edited by Pinto and Roberts) has as its final verse the following lines:

So now we beg you, Mr Squire  
do now, once and forever, retire  
and leave the critical piggy-wiggies.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.63; 1993a, p.681)

This colloquial, ironic style, employing tight rhythms and end-rhymes in order to embody and reveal the absurdity of the person targeted, is characteristic of the satiric verse throughout the 'More Pansies' notebook. In stark contrast, the following poem - 'Let there be Light!' - begins:

If ever there was a beginning  
there was no god in it  
there was no Verb  
no Voice  
no Word.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.63; 1993a, p.681)

Immediately this poem seems to locate itself in a different context and tradition: one of profound, philosophical reflection and contemplation. It is engaging with religious beliefs, both using and undermining the Biblical story of the Creation by asserting a contrary faith in the 'incomprehensible plasm of life, of creation' that struggles to come into being. It is also written in free verse, without recourse to the rhythms or rhymes of '[Mr Squire]'. This poem seems at first glance to be entirely unlike the previous satiric piece, while it is a clear precursor to the poem which follows it, 'God is Born!', which again deals with the mystery and wonder of Creation, and with the constantly regenerative

(unbiblical) manifestations of the births of the 'incomprehensible plasm of life' - now referred to as 'God'.

However, the break between '[Mr Squire]' and 'Let there be Light!' is by no means as 'sudden' as it appears to be on an initial reading. The latter is not solely an intensely serious, 'religious' poem: rather it is characterised by the Lawrentian wit evident in his habitual criticisms of human nature and society. It contains the lines:

There was nothing to say:  
Let there be light!  
All that story of Mr God switching on day  
is just conceit.

Just man's conceit!  
– Who made the sun?  
– My child, I cannot tell a lie,  
I made it! –

George Washington's Grandpapa! <sup>5</sup>  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.63; 1993a, p.681)

The poem is, in fact, not about 'God' as such, but about the 'Mr God' who springs from man's need to have things explained. The poem focuses on the deficiencies of *human* perception, and the inadequacy of the words through which perception is made palpable. The use of words ('Let There be Light!') to express the primal moment of creation becomes absurd when it is seen to occasion a ludicrously mundane, literalised and anachronistic picture of 'Mr God switching on day'. The Biblical 'Word' is deflated through becoming merely a synonym for 'Verb'; while God becomes 'Mr God', and consequently a figure bearing a marked resemblance to the 'Mr Squire' who leads 'the gawky choir / of critical cherubs that chirrup and pipe / in the weekly press their self-satisfied swipe'. While the poem 'Let there be Light' employs satire in order to deflate and mock religious conceit, '[Mr Squire]' employs religious

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<sup>5</sup> George Washington was the first President of the United States of America. The story that as a boy he refused to lie in order to avoid punishment for cutting down his father's cherry tree was popularised by Mason, Locke and Weens in a biography for children.



language and metaphor in order to satirise the character described initially (and biting) as 'Dearly-beloved' - the hyphen revealing that the conjoined words have assumed a collective identity as an orthodox cliché. The term 'self-satisfied' epitomises the preoccupations of the two poems, applicable as it is to the fanaticism both of undiscerning critics and of Bible-apologists.

Perhaps the most striking link between the two poems, however, is their shared contempt for superficial utterance: and, when considered in the light of this concern, the progression from the first poem to the second becomes more comprehensible. In the poem '[Thomas Earp]', appearing only one poem earlier than '[Mr Squire]' in the 'More Pansies' notebook, Lawrence has already mocked the 'chicken' who can 'neither paint nor write' but whose 'chirp' is employed in order to 'set other people right':

All people that can write or paint  
do tremble under my complaint.  
For I am a chicken, and I can chirp;  
and my name is Thomas, Thomas Earp.<sup>6</sup>  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.62; 1993a, p.680)

This depiction of the foul, fowl-like critics is continued with some variation in '[Mr Squire]', in which the 'critical cherubs that chirrup and pipe' express themselves as follows:

So long will they lift their impertinent voices  
and chirrup their almost indecent noises  
almost as empty as belching or hiccup,  
in grand chorale to your monthly kick-up.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.63; 1993a, p.681)

Language is shown to have become Yahoo-like, 'indecent' and obscene through its empty use in modern society.

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<sup>6</sup> On 24 August 1929 Lawrence sent his so-called 'Earp cackle' to Charles Lahr, suggesting that they should create a fortnightly magazine called 'The Squib'. Thomas Earp (1892-1958) was an art critic and translator who had accused Lawrence of an inability to paint. See Lawrence, 1993c, p.447 and n.1.

Hence the insistence on non-utterance in the following poem - 'Let There Be Light!' - describing the creative mysteries:

there was no Verb  
no Voice  
no Word.

There was nothing to say:  
Let there be light! –  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.63; 1993a, p.681)

Similarly, in the succeeding poem - 'God is Born!' - the ultimate, most miraculous moment of creation is accompanied not by the 'wild crying of every electron' but by a suspension of breath and being:

When the little eggy amoeba emerged out of foam and nowhere  
then all the electrons held their breath...  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.64; 1993a, p.682)

The holding back of breath seems an outward manifestation of the experience of wonder, which is the only appropriate response to the mysterious, multiple 'birth(s) of God'. In 'The White Horse' (the poem that follows 'God is Born!'), it is through being 'so silent' that horse and youth are able to become mutual inhabitants of 'another world'.

It is arguable, then, that the poems '[Thomas Earp]' and '[Mr Squire]' are not merely satirical 'squibs' which can be neatly parcelled up and categorised as entirely distinct from the nine profound 'religious' meditative poems that follow. Rather, they function as catalysts, provoking a conceptual recoil from debased utterance to the opposite extreme: suspended utterance, or even non-utterance ('silence'). The stupid misuse of words leads to the rejection of the Word as insufficient in responding to the wonder and mystery of creation: something presented as unutterable. What sustains and is however corrective and necessary is therefore wit, intelligence and play: the kind of



writing that describes a 'little, eggy amoeba' rather than (for instance) 'primitive life forms'.

My sense that there is no absolute, unquestionable break in the 'More Pansies' notebook between the satiric and mythopoeic verse - that any critically imposed categorisation is a wilful and arbitrary imposition - is supported by a consideration of verse appearing earlier in the MS. It becomes evident that the 'mythopoeic' verse is not confined merely to the last nine poems in the book. The most striking example of an earlier poem that would fit readily into a category of mythopoeic, philosophical, religious, lyrical or visionary poetry is 'Gladness of Death', which ends as follows:

I have always wanted to be as the flowers are  
so unhampered in their living and dying,  
and in death I believe I shall be as the flowers are.

I shall blossom like a dark pansy, and be delighted  
there among the dark sun-rays of death.  
I can feel myself unfolding in the dark sunshine of death  
to something flowery and fulfilled, and with a strange sweet perfume.

Men prevent one another from being men  
but in the great spaces of death  
the winds of the afterwards kiss us into blossom of manhood.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.58; 1993a, p.677)

This (unrhymed) meditation upon death may be located in several contexts, and explored in relation to any, or all, of them. It may be said to spring from the previous sparky, satirical verse which, through a consideration of debased human contacts/utterance, has provoked the following insight: 'Men prevent one another from being men'. When placed in a satirical context, the botanical imagery may be considered instrumental in determining the nature of the following poem 'Humanity Needs Pruning'.

Yet the stanzas are clearly lyrical rather than satirical, and bear closer resemblances to poems such as 'Glory of Darkness' (later redrafted as 'Bavarian Gentians'), 'Flowers and Men' and even 'Shadows' (in the 'Last Poems' notebook). In fact, the similarities with 'Shadows' are most striking, as

both poems are concerned with the progression from a broken state of dissolution (in which a man is prevented from being a man) to a curious blossoming, associated with death but envisaged as a state of grace:

And if, in the changing phases of man's life  
I fall in sickness and in misery  
my wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead  
and strength is gone, and my life  
is only the leavings of a life:

and still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of renewal  
odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers  
such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me -  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.727)

The correlation of imagery between the two passages quoted above (the latter taken from 'Shadows') is sufficient to suggest that an attempt to arrange these two poems according to aesthetic impression would result in 'Gladness of Death' being placed either at the end of the 'Last Poems' notebook, or at least with the nine 'mythopoeic' poems concluding the 'More Pansies' MS: certainly not earlier on, which is where it actually appears.

Although 'Gladness of Death' is the most striking example of a poem that defies the analytical categorisation dividing satire from mythopoeia, there are many others, even towards the beginning of the 'More Pansies' notebook. Poems such as 'Andraitx-Pomegranate Flowers' and 'The Heart of Man' are lyrical and philosophical respectively; while many poems concerning the nature of the gods, fallen angels and astrological changes are interspersed with the stinging, nettle-like satires. The poems in this ('More Pansies') notebook are falsified through separation by any rigidly imposed division or any attempt at categorisation.

### *A sequential approach: Holly Laird's triad.*

In his essay 'Some Issues for Study of Integrated Collections' Earl Miner suggests a different way of perceiving order within a collection. Stating that



‘Sequentiality implies an order to the series’ (Miner, 1986, p.29), he proceeds to examine the way in which sequential continuance exists as the ordering principle in the absence of plot in a minimal narrative:

Sequential continuousness (that is not redundant) is in any event a radical prior to plot in narrative. And the principles of that continuousness are beginnings and endings (in addition to *the* beginning and ending) that are separated-joined by continuances (as opposed to *the* continuousness). (Miner, 1986, pp.39-40)

The elision ‘separated-joined’ creates a good problem term to describe the possible links between poem sequences within a collection. The term implies a potential contradiction, but a way of perceiving and articulating order through a methodology that identifies *multiple* divisions (beginnings/endings) between poems or groups of poems. In her book on Lawrence’s poetry - *Self and Sequence* - Holly Laird adheres to this sense of order-through-sequencing. She is concerned with exploring the nature of a ‘verse-book’ (a book of poems) as a collection, proceeding methodologically from such a belief as has been articulated by William S. Anderson that ‘A normal book of poetry should have some order, some kind of arrangement that can be appreciated by readers as an enhancement of the separate poems’ (Anderson, 1986, p.47).

Laird’s emphasis on the ‘book’ or ‘volume’ as an entity is also a response to her sense that ‘The printed book seemed to [Lawrence] a vital form, both vulnerable to its readers and capable of changing them’ (Laird, 1988, pp.100-1). It is clear in Lawrence’s letters that he perceived the verse-book as having a distinct and distinctive ‘character’, for as a young man just arrived in London he alleged that:

I don’t feel the need, of much food of new ideas, or of too new sensations. My books are enough. What I do love are little volumes of poetry, quite fresh acquaintances. (Lawrence, 1979, p.106)

Laird quotes the above statement, as well as Lawrence’s assertion that ‘there is something peculiarly exciting and delightful about a book of verse’ (Lawrence,

1981, p.596), and his reference to *Love Poems and Others* as 'a volume of verse - my dearest treasure' (Lawrence, 1979, p.313). Laird considers his response in particular to the creation of the *Amores* volume, which provoked interesting and diverse reactions in its author at its various stages of composition. Initially, Lawrence professed that he had accumulated 'such a lot of poems, now, and such nice ones. I can make a most beautiful book' (Lawrence, 1981, p.513).<sup>7</sup>

Laird's emphasis on the volume - in part a response to Lawrence's feeling about the distinctive nature of a book of verse - enables her in *Self and Sequence* to argue convincingly for a sequential approach to Lawrence's poetry, considering the ways in which 'fleeting', 'fluid', 'vexed' and 'episodic' poems are 'gathered into sequences and books to reembody the order of the fluctuant self' (Laird, 1988, p.9). Although it is possible to extract poems from within their sequential contexts in order to examine them singly (and Laird offers analyses of numerous poems by considering them in this way) they are -

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<sup>7</sup> The creation of *Amores* proved in fact to be painful, as a result of the inevitable sensitivity that an artist has particularly for such autobiographical and unmasked writings:

I almost wept when I put together the *Amores* poems. It all seems so strange and far-off, unreal, and yet, in another mood, so near and *navrant*...I feel more inclined to burst into tears than any thing...I loathe it to go to a publisher. I feel for the moment most passionately and bitterly tender about it. (Lawrence, 1984, pp.61;94)

Whereas an individual poem is 'near and navrant', the process of ordering and finishing a volume sets the raw material at a distance, giving it a semblance of detachment and unreality. To use Laird's term, the book becomes 'pregnable' when exposed to the 'intransigent marketplace.' (Laird, 1988, p.121).

Lawrence, in the process of publishing *Women in Love*, expressed disillusionment regarding the 'marketplace' responsible for determining the fate of his favourite novel:

I have done a novel, which nobody will print, after the *Rainbow* experience. It has been the round of publishers by now, and rejected by all. I don't care. One might as well make roses bloom in January, as bring out living work into this present world of man. (Lawrence, 1984, p.100)

Sensitive again to the book's vulnerability once in the public domain, he wrote in August 1917 'it would be folly, I think, to publish it in the ordinary way, so exposed' (Lawrence, 1984, p.147).



in her view - best analysed in relation to the surrounding poems: she argues that 'the collection is greater than any of its members' (Laird, 1988, p.91).

Consequently Laird discusses verse-clusters and groupings, examining the diverse ways in which poems are 'linked' together stylistically, thematically or through the modulation of recurrent images or symbols; and the ways in which poem clusters generate and relate to other clusters. While considering these sequential patternings, she also attends to some incongruities and oddities within groups, and to the significance of the 'not said': the gaps between poems, groups or clusters which may in themselves play an important part in the developing verse-book. She says of *Amores*, for example: 'What is not told in the spaces within and between poems enlarges the emptiness that confronts the poet' (Laird, 1988, p.72). (I will return to this concept of conjectured textual 'gaps' or spaces later in this chapter, in my discussion of intertextual theory.) Laird also traces the developing methodologies which underlie Lawrence's procedures for ordering, selecting and revising poems within a particular volume. She examines the nature and status of each book (which she calls biography of an emotional and inner life) in its completed form, considering Lawrence's psychological motivation for reordering, omitting or fragmenting particular poems or clusters used in later collections.

In Laird's view, Lawrence's restless search for himself through poetic sequence is progressive, and culminates in his 'Last Poems', which she feels is a masterpiece in sequencing, despite its incomplete, unrevised condition:

By the time Lawrence wrote his *Last Poems*, sequential composition had become instinctive. If he had lived to publish these, it is unlikely that he would have altered them substantially from their final state in manuscript. (Laird, 1988, p.ix)

Laird argues for a 'cohesive sequence', dividing 'Last Poems' into nine groups or clusters, each group possessing its own beginning and end. Her sense of cohesion in this collection enables her to argue for a consequent sense of finality and certainty: 'questions and criticisms alike tend to be silenced by the

unusual certainty expressed in the poems. Nothing in the earlier books of poetry compares with the serene, seemingly unproblematic nature of this one' (Laird, 1988, p.220).

It seems to me, however, that to term the last poems unproblematic is to falsify their complexity and impact both as individual poems and as a potential book. The sequential approach here depends on our acknowledgement of the 'finishedness' which Laird erroneously affords 'Last Poems' when she places the notebook in the same category as completed volumes such as *Pansies* and *Nettles*:

in his last one and a half years [Lawrence] brought three further works of poetry to a finished state, *Pansies*, *Nettles*, and *Last Poems*, and demonstrated again his ability to alter the manner of verse and book to match the occasion. (Laird, 1988, p.196)

Laird here confuses Aldington's edition of Lawrence - *Last Poems* - with Lawrence's 'Last Poems', left in notebook form after Lawrence's death. It is crucial to make a distinction between the 'small volume' that became *Nettles* - the galley proofs of which Lawrence was correcting when lying in bed before leaving for the sanatorium at Vence <sup>8</sup> - and the 'death poems' which at that stage had no collective unity or group-integrity. *Nettles* had to be completed and published as soon as possible after composition, for the 'stinging' effect to have relevance to the contemporary situation. Its consequent publication (supervised by its author) allows it to be considered as a book, a volume, in a way that 'Last Poems' cannot. Considering these 'Last Poems' as a unified sequence is both interesting and problematic, for it involves an attempt to discuss a verse-book that never became a verse-book in the poet's lifetime.

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<sup>8</sup> The following description is given in *D.H. Lawrence: Reminiscences and Correspondence* by Earl and Achsah Brewster:

When [the door] was opened it disclosed Lawrence propped up in bed, galley sheets piled thick around him, correcting proofs of his 'Nettles.'  
(Brewster and Brewster, 1934, p.309)



'Last Poems' - as it was not brought to completion - becomes subject to speculation and conjecture. Laird discusses Richard Aldington's sense that the notebook is best thought of as 'a nearly finished work in itself, the trial run perhaps for a long poem' (Laird, 1988, p.198). Any sense of 'Last Poems' as a finished volume must be qualified by an acknowledgement that Lawrence almost certainly would have made substantial changes, reordering clusters, constructing longer poems or cycles or gutting the notebooks for separate, individual publications to include at a later date. Lawrence had always made substantial changes to his volumes, and the books he completed in 1928-30 were no exception. When preparing *Apocalypse* for publication, Lawrence excised or rearranged large chunks of the text; while *Assorted Articles*, prepared in 1930, was also extensively revised. It is probable that 'Last Poems' would have been subjected to exactly this process of revision, its 'book' version differing in crucial respects from the notebook sequences, thus reflecting the process of 'flux' through which (for example) the earlier *Amores* changed and progressed between manuscript and printed text.

This potential for new growth and development is (paradoxically) recognised by Laird, even after she erroneously distinguishes the 'more finished' 'Last Poems' notebook from the 'More Pansies' draft manuscript:

*More Pansies* may be considered a miscellany of drafts in the background of Lawrence's more finished works. *Pansies*, *Nettles*, and *Last Poems* all require and reward separate exegesis as sequences, with one caveat: that Lawrence probably would have revised *Last Poems* if he had lived to present it as a book. Any argument for internal coherence of that sequence should leave room for speculation about subsequent reshaping. (Laird, 1988, p.198)

The mention of the other ('More Pansies') notebook in Laird's description of a hypothesised 'reshaping' of 'Last Poems' is particularly revealing, for the death-poems in 'More Pansies' cannot be disregarded, and it is quite possible that a volume formed by Lawrence would have amalgamated the death-poems

of the two notebooks. Laird, having identified a 'break' before 'The Ship of Death' in 'Last Poems', conjectures:

Had [Lawrence] lived longer, he might have plumped out this juncture with poems from *More Pansies*. (Laird, 1988, p.232)

The suggestions she offers here, I must repeat, are merely speculative, and reveal the problems inherent in an attempt to fathom authorial intention and 'glean' from the poetic sequence Lawrence's methodology of revision. The conjectured 'reshaping' of poems thus introduces an entirely new dimension of complexity into the issue of sequencing and collecting poems.

Just as an analysis of ['Mr Squire'] and 'Let There Be Light!' reveals the inadequacy of Pollnitz's categorising, so the inevitable problems, paradoxes and confusions arising from the sequential approach become evident if we consider one of the nine 'groups' that (according to Laird) constitute 'Last Poems'. Laird's third group begins with the poem 'Invocation to the Moon', and also includes 'Butterfly', 'Bavarian Gentians', 'Lucifer', 'The Breath of Life' and 'Silence'. She characterises this group by saying that in these poems, the previous 'battles of thought are superseded by invocational narratives' (Laird, 1988, p.225). Undeniably this is true of the first two poems, in which the moon and butterfly are directly addressed; it is also true of 'Silence', which begins with the line 'Come, holy Silence, come'. Yet 'The Breath of Life' is didactic or thoughtful - certainly not invocational - and although 'Bavarian Gentians' contains the line 'Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!' this demand is clearly rhetorical, while the analogous demand 'But tell me, tell me' in 'Lucifer' is not intended as a direct address. Paradoxically the poem 'The Hands of God' which begins Laird's next sequence is more obviously invocational than two of the poems within the 'invocational' group, as it contains the direct appeal to divinity: 'Save me, O God, from falling...Let me never know, O God'. 'The Hands of God' also engages with the fallen angel preoccupation, in the lines: 'Did Lucifer fall through knowledge? / oh then, pity



him, pity him that plunge!'. This appeal is obviously connected with the 'Lucifer' poem, concerned with debating the angel's loss or preservation of brightness after his fall. It seems wrong to conceive a group structure which severs 'The Hands of God' from two of the previous poems to which it is clearly linked in style, imagery and content.

Another problem arises from Laird's sense that the three poems 'Butterfly', 'Bavarian Gentians' and 'Lucifer' form a triad within the poem-group. She argues that 'Butterfly' and 'Bavarian Gentians' were 'obviously designed as pendants' (Laird, 1988, p.226), as they were subject to revision in the 'More Pansies' notebook and subsequently placed side by side. Yet while arguing that Lawrence scrupulously moved this pair of poems and placed them in a particular location in the 'Last Poems' notebook, she also (paradoxically) conjectures that when revising the manuscript poems for a printed book Lawrence would have changed the order of the poems in order to reverse the 'jarring' chronology in which October precedes September. She goes on to say that 'Lucifer' is a passionate (albeit brief) thought whose 'enlargement' of 'Bavarian Gentians' resembles the effect of Coleridge's glosses on the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: 'Omitting "Lucifer" and "Butterfly" as aspects of "Bavarian Gentians" would diminish the central poem. And the triad offers an example of the way poems work together throughout the sequence' (Laird, 1988, p.228). According to this model, juxtaposition of poems through sequencing can play the role of prose exegesis, furnishing the reader directly with the poet's own comments on his work. Perhaps aspects of 'Bavarian Gentians' are illuminated by considering its relation to these other poems. Yet aspects of 'Bavarian Gentians' might be illuminated by considering the earlier poems 'Blueness' and even 'Snake' (a comparison made by Laird); or, indeed, Lawrence's writings on Etruria, in which his descent into the ancient tombs, lit by an acetylene lamp, is described in strikingly similar terms to the descent into Hades evoked in this late poem.

When offering a poem-group structure for 'Last Poems', it seems to me that it would be equally plausible to split Laird's triad between 'Butterfly' and

✓ 'Bavarian Gentians', on the grounds that 'Butterfly' forms a neat stylistic pair with 'Invocation to the Moon'; while the striking dark/blue/flame imagery of 'Bavarian Gentians' generates the 'dark-blue depths', 'layers and layers of darkness' and the contrasting 'gleam' of 'Lucifer'. I hope, through suggesting this alternative arrangement, to reveal something of the wilful and arbitrary nature of sequencing. The main problem with sequential analysis is that - like the placing of a division or break at one point in a notebook - it must inevitably entail an imposing of categories upon the poems concerned, in a way which often falsifies the real nature of the manuscript material or book. Poems may be ✓ yoked by ingenuity together, forced or falsified in order to fit them neatly and appropriately into a preordained plan. 'Evidence' becomes a questionable concept, and the process becomes analogous to the process by which Jane Austen's Emma manipulates and misconstrues circumstances in an attempt to ✓ achieve her desired goal: 'She had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made everything bend to it' (Austen, 1971, p.121). Sequencing is both interpretative and subjective; it also tends to result in a closing-off of alternative interpretations and possibilities. Laird argues that at the end of 'Lucifer' 'This shift "towards us" brings the triad of poems to a neat close' (Laird, 1988, p.228). Such 'neat' closure would anyway probably be antithetical to Lawrence's aims, as he said of the free-verse method which he derived from the poetry of Whitman: 'It has no goal in either eternity. It has no finish. It has no satisfying stability, satisfying to those who like the immutable. None of this. It is the instant; the quick; the very jetting source of all will-be and has-been' (Lawrence, 1936, p.221). Accounts of the last poems should almost certainly avoid interpreting them as closed sequences, and over-simplifying the 'shaping' process that has produced them by placing them merely in their immediate sequential contexts. It seems that a wider contextualisation is necessary: one which at least places the poems in the context of their previous draft-stages, and recognises that 'shaping' is inevitably a 'reshaping' of precursive texts.



*Shaping as 'reshaping': Lawrence's use of the 'More Pansies' material.*

An interpretation of 'Last Poems' that defines 'shaping' as 'reshaping' must take into account the 'More Pansies' notebook and consider the allied issue of drafting and revision. The argument for consecutive composition that undermines Aldington's desire to present simultaneous use leads Pollnitz to reject the possibility of a process of revision involving the conscious re-drafting of poems from 'More Pansies' into the 'Last Poems' notebook. An alternative approach (and one which I believe to be equally valid) would be to argue that Lawrence, having filled the 'More Pansies' notebook, then began writing poems into another; but, when he needed to, referred back to the filled notebook in order to find raw material from which he could fashion his death poems. The process of revision would thus become analogous to the drafting of the last version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in 1928, during which Lawrence strategically referred to the previous drafts in order to rewrite and reshape the novel.<sup>9</sup>

My supposition that Lawrence composed parts of 'Last Poems' with the 'More Pansies' notebook in front of him may be supported (although by no means proved) by the following observation made by Aldington and quoted by Christopher Pollnitz:

Huxley is wrong in saying L[awrence] never corrected but re-wrote. He did re-write, but that *MS* vol of *Last Poems* I edited was so corrected and crossed out and interpolated I had great trouble finding the real text. (Aldington, 1981, p.16)

Pollnitz has expressed his belief (as a result of a detailed perusal of the MSS at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin) that at some stage Lawrence went through the entire 'Last Poems' notebook, making substantial revisions and corrections. This proves the process of

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of the composition of the three versions of this novel, see Squires, 1993, pp.xx-xxviii.

creation to have been more closely regulated than is often supposed, concerned with the minutiae of individual poems, rather than simply with the impact of the notebook as a whole. The 'thicket-like appearance of some of Lawrence's manuscript pages' (Pollnitz, 1995, p.155) suggests that Lawrence was not just correcting his poems but revising, developing and recreating them; and the correlations (evident for instance in title, subject-matter and style) between drafts of poems contained within the two notebooks suggest that the 'Last Poems' poetry may be examined as progressions from the poem-sequences begun in the earlier 'More Pansies' MS. I hope to show that this approach is analytically useful and illuminating, and although it contradicts Christopher Pollnitz's sense of Lawrence's revision process, it is founded on his (and Keith Sagar's) insight that the two last poem notebooks were produced sequentially rather than simultaneously, so that Lawrence was able to draw on the 'More Pansies' MS in its entirety when he came to transcribe the death-poems into his other notebook. In order to substantiate my argument regarding Lawrence's drafting procedure, I will attempt to show that the 'God is Born!' sequence that begins in the 'More Pansies' notebook indirectly occasions some of the finest death-poetry in 'Last Poems'.

The jubilant exclamation 'God is Born!' is repeated no less than ten times during the course of the poem with this title. Yet its impact was not, in the process of poetic composition, limited to this particular poem. It gave rise to a poem-cluster (to adopt Laird's terminology) which incorporates the first extant drafts of the poems that became 'Butterfly', 'Bavarian Gentians' and 'The Ship of Death' as well as, in embryo, 'Silence' and 'Shadows'. The original 'Butterfly' poem, which was crossed out and re-written entirely in the 'More Pansies' notebook ended as follows:

When I see its veined wings lifted  
as it sips at the dirt on my shoe  
my soul says at once:  
God is born!

(Lawrence, MS1, p.65)



The butterfly was initially a manifestation of God's grace, rather than (as it became on revision) a poignant symbol for the departing soul faced with dissolution. Similarly, the initial version of 'The White Horse' was:

The youth walks up to the white horse, to put its halter on  
and something in the still, sure pride of the lad makes me say:  
God is born!

(Lawrence, MS1, p.65)

The lad becomes a human manifestation of the process by which 'God is born!'. A further progression extends these religious resonances to the title of the poem 'State of Grace' (this initial title has been scored out in the manuscript and remains uncertain), which became 'Bavarian Gentians', and to the description of the flowers as possessing 'dark blue godhead'. The term 'godhead' was also employed in the first drafting of the next poem, 'Flowers and Men', in which the honeysuckle pours out 'the breath of its godhead'.

At some point Lawrence revised these poems in the 'More Pansies' notebook: and it is interesting to conjecture as to the stage at which this occurred. It seems likely from the coherence and consistency of the 'god' and 'godhead' references that he returned to these poems and revised several of them at once, rather than altering each one after completion. It is even possible that he altered these poems when faced with the task of transcribing a version of them into his later ('Last Poems') notebook. Certainly a uniform pattern of correction emerges, in which the poems are obviously 'secularised', divested of all the references to 'god' and 'godhead'. The explicitly religious terminology and suggestion is replaced by references to cosmic 'wonder' (in the over-scored 'Butterfly') in response to naturalistic description of the creature that 'lifts his wings, lifts them / and sips at the dirt on my shoe'. Naturalistic description similarly ousts religious imagery in the revised versions of 'The White Horse', 'Glory of Darkness' and 'Flowers and Men'. In the former, horse and youth experience a transcendence that is no longer religious through the power of 'silence'; while in 'Glory of Darkness' the title replaces the

previous 'State of Grace', the term 'glory' is later replaced by 'beauty', and 'blue godhead' becomes 'blue fringes'. In 'Flowers and Men' the miraculous essence of flowers is captured in the term 'floweriness' rather than 'godhead', while 'beauty' serves as another substitution, and the honeysuckle merely pours out 'his breath' (rather than 'the breath of his godhead').

The poems I have just described (which, given a collective identity according to the sequencing approach, might be termed the 'God is Born!' group) clearly served as raw material when Lawrence was filling the 'Last Poems' notebook. After completing 'Invocation to the Moon', Lawrence evidently decided to return to the 'More Pansies' notebook, as the poem 'Butterfly' is next in sequence. One possible explanation is that 'Invocation to the Moon' was written with the poem 'Prayer' (the final poem in 'More Pansies') either as a conscious stimulus or as an unconscious association, thus alerting Lawrence to the availability of other poems in the previous notebook. Another explanation is that the invocatory style of the 'moon' poem proved effective in itself, and hence offered a suitable mould for the recasting of an old poem. On perusal of the 'More Pansies' MS, 'Butterfly' (now existing in two versions, the earlier struck through) would have seemed suitable: the naturalistic description of the creature as well as the sense of 'wonder' it inspired could readily be transformed into a direct, invitational address. The revised 'More Pansies' version already possessed an incantatory feel, achieved through the repetitions in 'lifts its veined wings, lifts them', and 'lifts his wings, lifts them'. The invitational ('Last Poems') version, creating a vivid sense of actuality, alters these lines slightly so they become: 'lifting your veined wings, lifting them? big white butterfly!'. This line is preceded by an image derived from the earliest 'More Pansies' version of the poem and repeated at the end of both verses of the second draft: a description of the butterfly as it 'sips at the dirt on my shoe'. Then, in the 'Last Poems' version, the image becomes part of a poignant and invocatory interrogative: 'Butterfly, why do you settle on my shoe, and sip the dirt on my shoe...?'. Later (in the same version) the butterfly is described as 'content on my shoe'. The creature has become an emblem for



the soul, poised on the brink of death, but content to remain in the 'warm' garden of life, still belonging to the mortal body (for which the dirty shoe becomes an emblem). It acquires a symbolic resonance entirely absent from the earlier drafts of the poem; yet employs the striking imagery clearly derived from them.

The poem 'Butterfly', then, changes from a naturalistic description of the butterfly as embodiment of the awe-inspiring creator-god to a symbol for the departing soul faced with death but unwilling to depart from life. It seems crucial when analysing 'Butterfly', then, not just to see it as part of a sequence or triad or as a 'Last Poems' text that has superseded all prior versions, but to place it in the context of its previous drafts, so as to show how Lawrence was redrafting material, cross-referencing between notebooks and interpolating material into new contexts in the other notebook, thus changing his poem's ostensible meaning, resonances and implications.

This process is also evident on consideration of the two short poems 'Lucifer' and 'The Breath of Life' which appear in 'More Pansies' and also (slightly altered) after the two versions of 'Bavarian Gentians' in the 'Last Poems' notebook.<sup>10</sup> These poems above all others seem to prove irrevocably that Lawrence was referring back to the 'More Pansies' MS when working in the subsequent notebook. The first three lines of the 'Lucifer' poems in each notebook are identical, with only the minor re-ordering of the words 'he' and 'the' in the later version. Yet a significant alteration and extension occurs, as the last two lines of the 'More Pansies' MS poem - 'He only fell out of your ken, you orthodox angels, / you dull angels, tarnished with centuries of

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, in the 'Last Poems' as in the 'More Pansies' MS, two drafts of 'Bavarian Gentians' appear, this time consecutively. The complex process of revision here leads to a confusion as to which version should be considered as Lawrence's final intention. Keith Sagar (in Sagar, 1975, pp.47-53) has persuasively challenged the decision made by Aldington to print the draft that appears first in the notebook. It seems that Christopher Pollnitz's decision to print both drafts on facing pages of the new CUP variorum edition will offer the only satisfactory way of presenting the textual states of the two poems which comprise 'Bavarian Gentians'.

conventionality' (Lawrence, MS1, p.11; 1993a, p.614) - are replaced by the following:

In the dark-blue depths, under layers and layers of darkness,  
I see him more like the ruby, a gleam from within  
of his own magnificence,  
coming like the ruby in the invisible dark, glowing  
with his own annunciation, towards us.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.697)

Clearly the poem 'Bavarian Gentians', with its dark blue depths and layers of darknesses, has intervened between the composition of the 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems' versions of 'Lucifer'. Perhaps Lawrence was consciously looking in the 'More Pansies' MS for a poem that would fit into the 'Bavarian Gentians' sequence, concerned with Etruscan-tomb-like underworlds and the visibility/invisibility occasioned by the effects of darkness lit with blue gentian torches. The title 'Lucifer' (identical to that of the 'More Pansies' MS poem) also helps us to a near certainty that the earlier draft was consciously adopted and adapted: unlike in the poem 'When Satan Fell' (appearing much earlier than 'Lucifer' in the 'Last Poems' notebook), whose title affords it a new identity.

The case of the two drafts of 'The Breath of Life' is analogous, as the earlier version is adopted then altered as it is recontextualised:

The breath of life and the sharp winds of change are the same thing.  
But people who are fallen from the organic connection with the cosmos  
feel the winds of change grind them down  
and the breath of life never comes to nourish them.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.12; 1993a, p.615)

The breath of life is in the sharp winds of change  
mingled with the breath of destruction.  
But if you want to breathe deep, sumptuous life  
breathe all alone, in silence, in the dark,  
and see nothing.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.698)



Here, the shift is from a preoccupation with the inorganic, mechanical nature of people who have lost their connection with the cosmos, to a body-centred awareness of being alive 'sumptuously' in aloneness, silence, stillness and darkness. As in the 'Lucifer' of 'Last Poems', the later preoccupation is with darkness, and again may be derived from the 'Bavarian Gentians' imagery of the Etruscan-tomb-Hades (perhaps Lawrence had the previous title of 'Bavarian Gentians' - 'Glory of Darkness' - in mind).

I am suggesting, then, that Lawrence is certainly using material from his old notebook, but regenerating and reinvigorating this material, provoking new insights and new contexts in which previous ideas and images can assume a fresh significance. Considering poems merely as clusters within a particular notebook must therefore be recognised as insufficient for determining the 'shaping' process that has created these poems. The apparent 'shaping' explored in Laird's sequencing must be recognised as itself a possible 'reshaping' of previously composed draft material. Christopher Pollnitz emphasises the value of representing and exploring the various draft-stages through which MS poems pass during composition, and without which the scholar forfeits a necessary intimacy with the text:

Reading the late notebooks is also an 'intimate' experience in the sense in which Robert Hughes refers to a viewing of Auerbach's heavily reworked drawings as intimate. As part of the pleasure of looking at a drawing may come through a speculative awareness of the stages by which it reached its exhibited form, so a multiply revised Lawrence poem allows a reader of the original manuscript to reconstruct the stages of its composition, and to read the stages as completed drafts. (Pollnitz, 1995, p.155)

The perusal of poem-drafts leads, in Pollnitz's view, to the pleasure of recognising clearly defined stages in a poem's composition. The complexity of the composition process is in part acknowledged by considering a poem in the retrospective light of its previous successive reshaping. 'Last Poems' as the focus of this thesis, will, according to this argument, be expanded as a category in order to incorporate the precursive 'More Pansies' poems/drafts, so that my

discussion will be concerned not with the material within a single notebook, but with the composite *Last Poems*.

Perhaps, though, even this approach (advocating the reconstruction of completed drafts as stages) is too narrow and simplistic. Pollnitz admits that there are often times when these stages remain undefinable and elusive, reliant merely on scholarly conjecture. It is often impossible to determine at what 'stage' revisions were made, to establish chronology and to afford definitive, final status to one particular draft. Such textual instability leads to an acknowledgement of the complexity of the process by which texts evolve as they assimilate new resonances and associations, and are placed in new, constantly shifting or deferring linguistic contexts. These considerations impel one towards a definition of Lawrentian poetic text that emphasises unfinishedness, and a ceaseless creation and exchange of meaning.

A text may be consciously reworked or 'reshaped' by its author, as in the case of Lawrence's manipulation of text within the 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems' notebooks. It will also simultaneously constitute a reshaping of multiple intertexts, and will enter into an intertextual continuum in which it is itself reworked and rewritten subconsciously, both by its own author and by numerous others. This definition of the term reshaping introduces great complexity into my attempt to define the nature of Lawrence's poetry writing. When considering the composition of poems and collections of poems it seems to be necessary to range far beyond Holly Laird's idea of sequencing; beyond even the cross-referencing between notebooks that I have employed (for instance) in order to provide some insight into the genesis of the poem 'Butterfly'. It is necessary, perhaps to challenge our preconceptions regarding poetic composition, and to undermine the distinction between the terms 'shaping' and 'reshaping' when applied to the drafting of poems. It is necessary, also, to interrogate the nature and status of texts, adopting a methodology that engages usefully with theories of influence and intertextuality.



*Chaos in Poetry: Lawrence, verse-books and dialogism.*

Approaches to poetry relying on an analysis of sequencing or close drafting and redrafting are bound to be reductive, as they fail to acknowledge textual and intertextual complexity, otherwise (more radically) conceived as textual chaos. Lawrence, in his late essays, offers some interesting comments on the nature of 'chaos in poetry' which provoke new perspectives on his own poetry writing, and interestingly anticipate some postmodernist approaches.

In the 'Foreword to *Pansies*' he wrote in March 1929, Lawrence asserts that poetry must capture fleetingly a moment of vivid life, rather than being a gem-like artefact envisaged as a fixed point in time and space, which he conceives as like Keats' Grecian Urn:

So I should wish these *Pansies* to be taken as thoughts rather than anything else; casual thoughts that are true while they are true and irrelevant when the mood and circumstance changes. I should like them to be as fleeting as pansies, which wilt so soon, and are so fascinating with their varied faces, while they last. And flowers, to my thinking, are not merely pretty-pretty. They have in their fragrance an earthiness of the humus and the corruptive earth from which they spring. And pansies, in their streaked faces, have a look of many things besides heartsease. (Lawrence, 1992a, p.290)

Pansies, with their 'varied faces' resulting from the 'earthiness of the humus and the corruptive earth from which they spring', become emblematic of the instability of poetry's engagement with the world. The flowers and humus might also take on further signification, implying the plethora of other texts with which poems constantly engage and interact, in the flux of meaning and association, thus suggesting that the instability is inherent in poetic language itself. Lawrence considered that poetry of the present (the poetry of Whitman as distinct from that of Shelley and Keats) derives its distinctively liberating (even visionary) quality precisely through its embodiment of textual incongruity, or a 'constant, ceaseless creation and exchange of meaning', in which one eternal moment is easily contradicted by the next eternal moment.

In his essay 'Chaos in Poetry', written in April 1928 - about a year before the 'Foreword' to *Pansies* - Lawrence articulates his own conception of this kind of textual chaos:

Whims, and fumbings, and effort, and nonsense, and echoes from other poets, these all go to make up the living chaos of a little book of real poetry...Through it all runs the intrinsic naiveté without which no poetry can exist, not even the most sophisticated...In this act, and this alone, we truly *live*: in that innermost naive opening of the soul, like a flower, like an animal, like a coloured snake, it does not matter, to the sun of chaotic livingness. (Lawrence, 1936, p.261)

The verse-book described here is not a completed, polished entity, but rather an attempt or exercise: a text riddled with contradiction and incongruity. Part of the incongruity arises from the fact that a verse-book necessarily incorporates 'echoes from other poets': it will engage in the practice currently known as 'intertextuality'. In the above quotation the writer seems to be openly and promiscuously receptive to all other texts (taking the term 'text' in its broadest definition <sup>11</sup>) resulting in the 'chaotic livingness' of a book of verse. The textual chaos is provoked by the spontaneous creative activity through which each embodied poem comes into being: in Lawrence's words 'The utterance is like a spasm, naked contact with all influences at once' (Lawrence, 1936, p.221). The term spasm is problematic as it suggests pure spontaneity of expression

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<sup>11</sup> In their introduction to *Intertextuality* Judith Still and Michael Worton consider broader definitions of 'text', particularly in relation to the essay by John Frow included in this book. The following serves as a useful, albeit brief, summary of key ideas discussed:

John Frow points out...that there are practical (political) implications which result from the blurring - or erasing - of the ontological distinction between the categories of the textual and the real, not least the problem of determination. But the implications are not only problematic, they are also positive. The analysis of intertextuality, we would like to argue, is inevitably political in its assertion that - at the very least - the textual and the 'extra-textual' inhabit each other, or that - more radically - the 'extra-textual' is another kind of text. (Still and Worton, 1990, p.33)

See also John Frow's essay 'Intertextuality and Ontology' (Frow, 1990, pp.45-55).



immune from deliberate revision and conscious artistry.<sup>12</sup> Yet the idea of a poem which, at the moment of composition, is nakedly exposed to all influences simultaneously, is interesting and functional. It suggests that a text will be intertextually full and resonant, and hints at the kind of (inter)textual complexity that is bound to result from this kind of contact. It implies contact that is immediate, uncalculating and indiscriminate. It undermines any simplistic concept of influence as a clearly definable process which can be identified or 'solved' though source-hunting.

Lawrence's emphasis in the above quotation on the (inter)textual complexity of a 'book' rather than individual poems is significant: for a book or collection - like a novel - can embody textual complexity/chaos in a way that an individual poem cannot. In his essay 'Why the Novel Matters' Lawrence refers to the novel as the 'one bright book of life', attributing its brightness to the multiplicity of resonances and perspectives which can be embodied within such an extended prose-work. A novel can be polyphonic or multi-valent/vocal, while a single poem tends to offer a single perspective, a single voice. This distinction - between the dialogic novel and monologic poetry - lies at the heart of Mikhail Bakhtin's evaluation of literary genre. In a formulation strikingly similar to Lawrence's description of the novel, Bakhtin (in the words of his translator and editor Michael Holquist) states:

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<sup>12</sup> The spontaneity/revision paradox is prevalent throughout Lawrence's 1919 essay 'Poetry of the Present'. Lawrence argues that new poetry, such as that of Whitman, is distinguishable from 'finished', consummate poetry of the past because it embodies textual incongruity or chaos:

But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present...The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon.

(Lawrence, 1936, pp.218-19)

The web image is used rather oddly here, in order to create the sense of an utterly spontaneous creative drive in which the utterance is like a 'naked spasm' rather than a carefully regulated, controlled artefact. Yet a spider's web must be carefully and intricately spun into the required pattern in a way which seems to contradict the arbitrary nature of spontaneous intermingling, so that the image may be seen as an apposite embodiment of the paradox inherent in Lawrence's poetics. The strands of a poem may seem to be arbitrarily and spontaneously intertwined (flying, quivering, intermingling); yet the effect is (paradoxically) achieved through a cultivated spontaneity, whose underlying pattern gives integrity to the overall conception, and to the larger structure.

In dialogism, the novel is the great book of life, because it celebrates the grotesque body of the world. Dialogism figures a close relation between bodies and novels because they both militate against monadism...and the concept of a pristine, closed-off, static identity and truth wherever it may be found. (Holquist, 1990, p.90)

Bakhtin creates the category 'novelness' in order to show how the novel is marked off from other (lesser) genres: it is 'energized by forces set in motion by the give-and-take between stasis and change, the fixity of language vs. the flux of utterance, all of which animate the dialogue between self and other' (Holquist, 1990, p.181). It possesses the 'peculiar ability to open a window in discourse from which the extraordinary variety of social languages can be perceived' (Holquist, 1990, p.72), without reducing different types of discourse to a common denominator or forfeiting their distinct expressiveness (see Lodge, 1990, p.49; p.187, n.14). In dialogism such multi-valence is distinguished from the characteristic uni-vocality of the other genres, including poetry, as David Lodge explains:

For the 'canonized' genres - epic, tragedy and lyric - are what Bakhtin calls 'monologic': they seek to establish a single style, a single voice, with which to express a single world-view. Even if individual characters express distinct and opposing views in such a text, nevertheless an all-pervasive poetic decorum, or the regularities of rhythm and metre, ensure that the total effect is one of stylistic (and ideological) consistency and homogeneity. (Lodge, 1990, p.58)

Poetry, according to this argument, is restricted by the limits imposed upon it by form, remaining homogeneous rather than multi-vocal.

However, it seems that in practice these genre categories are not absolute. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin describes the possible slippage experienced by a poetic symbol when it is made ambivalent through encountering other perspectives:

As soon as another's voice, another's accent, the possibility of another's point of view breaks through this play of the symbol, the



poetic plane is destroyed and the symbol is translated on to the plane of prose. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.328)

Through this paradoxical 'prosing' or 'novelization' of poetry, a generic confusion can occur in which (for instance) Yeats' 'Among Schoolchildren' can become 'a masterpiece in prose' (Lodge, 1990, p.97), for 'Bakhtin never claimed that *verse* as a medium was necessarily monologic. One of his favourite sources of examples of dialogic discourse was Pushkin's verse novel, *Eugene Onegin*' (Lodge, 1990, p.96). Julia Kristeva emphasises the arbitrariness of the division separating novel from poetry within dialogism by referring always to 'poetic language' in her essay on Bakhtin.

The necessary redefinition - in which the genre-category described using such terms as 'dialogism', 'novelness', 'heteroglossia', 'polyphony' and 'ambivalence' is expanded to include poetry - seems to undermine Todorov's perception that 'La prose qui est intertextuelle s'oppose a la poesie qui ne l'est pas' (Todorov, 1981, p.100). It is certainly arguable that even if a single poem is monologic a *book* of verse - embodying as it will a multiplicity of perspectives - is necessarily conceived as dialogic. Against a perception of a stabilising unity imposed by the collecting of poems into a book can be established an awareness of potential contradiction and multiplicity:

if the poetry book might...be viewed as a potential hermeneutic straitjacket, fashioned to restrict the reader's movements, it might also be seen as a form through which poets can supplant or destabilize the meaning of one poem by that of others, freeing the reader to pursue any number of interpretive paths. And the cost of this freedom is the troublesome recognition that our articulation of any pattern in a book will inevitably be at the expense of other, perhaps equally conceivable, schemes. (Fraistat, 1986, p.10)

This seems particularly true of a book of free-verse poetry which is struggling to achieve the formlessness of spontaneity, eschewing the rigidity of gem-like, fixed verse, and (according to its author) which makes a virtue out of its own incongruous, whim-ful fumbings. It seems entirely appropriate, when discussing the nature and composition of Lawrence's *Last Poems*, to adopt an

intertextual approach, replacing the limited conception of poetic sequencing with a broader method that recognises the many-voiced quality of the embodied material.

*Chaos in poetics: a struggle for critical tools and terms.*

Critics are faced with the difficult task of finding an appropriate methodology which is not in itself anarchic, yet which can be profitably employed in an exploration and articulation of textual chaos, so that they avoid imposing an illusion of coherence and homogeneity on the intertextual process. This task seems by nature to be problematic, for the chaotic, plural, elusive nature of texts precludes the possibility of making direct links and labelling trails or traces with any certainty. The process is doubly complex when intertextuality is recognised as a doubling of discourses, in which 'New writing is grafted upon the closed and finished structure of the "déjà écrit"' (Orr, 1993, p.14). A text that may seem to have been 'closed' within its structure and context is reopened through intertextual interaction, so that key elements are appropriated and reinvigorated through recontextualisation. The reopening of texts through intertextuality may also be explored via theories regarding the psychological and motivational aspects of literary appropriation:

Writers of richly intertextual works may allude to precursors for various reasons: to demonstrate admiration, to make use of the earlier writer (or even a contemporary) as an authenticating authority, to enter into a debate, or to subvert or transvalue a specific system of beliefs he or she might have held. (Harrison, 1990, p.1)

The most notable (and perhaps notorious) exponent of the idea of psychological interaction between writers is Harold Bloom, whose consideration of 'influence' serves as a useful starting-point in my discussion of specifically theoretical approaches to intertextuality.

Harold Bloom's definition of 'influence' in *The Anxiety of Influence* highlights the kind of problems inherent in the critical use of this particular



term. He states that the term had its received meaning of 'having a power over another' as early as the Scholastic Latin of Aquinas, but that only after centuries did it lose its root meaning of 'inflow', and 'its prime meaning of an emanation or force coming in upon mankind from the stars':

As first used, to be influenced meant to receive an ethereal fluid flowing in upon one from the stars, a fluid that affected one's character and destiny, and that altered all sublunary things. A power divine and moral - later simply a secret power - exercised itself, in defiance of all that had seemed voluntary in one.

(Bloom, 1973, pp.26-7)

This conception of influence emphasises the potency of a force that can alter one's character and destiny. Yet 'influence' is, in the above definition, made intangible and mysterious through the use of such terms as 'ethereal', 'divine' and 'moral'. Historically it is thus seen to uphold a God- or Author-centred conception of transcendental creative inspiration; or, in psychoanalytic terms (adopted by Bloom throughout his study), to posit a father-figure as origin. Bloom rejects the implications of this outmoded conception of poetic influence, replacing the term 'influence' with the term 'misprision', and formulating six specific categories in order to explain what he sees as the precise nature of intra-poetic relationships. Thus he dispenses with the 'prime' or original meaning of 'influence' in order to engage with a later definition of the term, namely 'having a power over another'.

Bloom's categories, centring on the intra-poetic power struggle, are useful in emphasising the complex psychological motivation that underlies a poet's engagement with 'strong' precursors. Bloom emphasises the destructive, Oedipal aspect of the process by which a strong poet or ephebe struggles with and against a precursor, misreading him in order to carve out his own distinct passage. Yet, in order to explore the nature of misreading or misprision, Bloom must proceed from and adhere to Malraux's assumption that specific literary 'denizens' can be readily identified as crucially influential:

Every young man's heart is a graveyard in which are inscribed the names of a thousand dead artists but whose only actual denizens are a few mighty, often antagonistic, ghosts. (Bloom, 1973, p.26)

Arguably, this conception of influence over-simplifies the process of ceaseless assimilation and exchange of meaning operative in the 'infinite' space of intertextuality, doing so in order to facilitate selection and categorisation, and perhaps in addition to justify Bloom's psychological thesis.

The definition of influence from which Bloom proceeds - 'having power over another' - seems inevitably to imply a one-to-one relationship in which the 'other' may be fixed and categorised. Sean Hand emphasises the ego- or author-centric and also narcissistic nature of Bloom's emphasis on the particularity of poetic interrelation, which (he argues) trivialises its own theoretical approach by fictitiously solving or resolving intertextual complexity:

The resolution of intertextual tension by individual disposition is apparent in two major theorists: Harold Bloom and Michael Riffaterre...Thus, in *The Anxiety of Influence* individual authors struggle to attain maturity by swerving away from their precursors (*clinamen*), completing them (*tessera*), breaking with them (*kenosis*), mythifying them (*daemonization*), purging all links (*askesis*) or assuming their place (*apophrades*). By shifting back from text to author in this way, Bloom views intertextuality as the vigorous development of an ego seeking to recover a primary narcissism from which it is withheld by its immediate precursor.

(Hand, 1990, pp.84-5)

Hand caricatures Bloom's theory as 'the armwrestling of strong poets': an image suggesting that one of his most violent objections is to the very literal selective process by which two poets (at a time) are linked by the critic and scrutinised, as though they were engaging in trivial yet ostentatious (hence conspicuous) shows of strength. Significantly, in armwrestling, although the conflict may be prolonged and bitterly contested, there is invariably a clear winner. Hand's metaphor of arms thus seems aptly chosen when his agenda is to reveal the inadequacy of Bloom's theory, which resolves irresolvable tensions through defining textual trace by means of Authorial anxiety,



neglecting the retrospective participation of the reader, and trivialising the trace-ridden, fabric- or web-like complexity of the chaotic text.

Julia Kristeva offers a linguistic account that stresses the complexity of the way in which texts interact. In her essay on Bakhtin - 'Word, dialogue and novel' - she emphasises the 'unconscious' and pluralistic nature of 'intertextuality' (a term she herself coined), involving the interchange of sign-systems causing a 'literary word' (as minimal structural unit) to signify 'beneath' language, and to become 'ambivalent' through textual 'intersection':

What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is [Bakhtin's] conception of the 'literary word' as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context. (Kristeva, 1986, p.36)

Her phrase 'intersection of textual surfaces' is useful in contradicting the sense of a single, fixed, unequivocal link between two related texts (or 'text' and 'intertext') that is exclusive and clearly definable. It seems to me that in this formulation, Kristeva is suggesting that words interact through addition or substitution across sign-systems: and by so-doing end up 'signifying beneath the surface of language', acquiring resonances and associations that operate at a deeper (unconscious) level and are constantly shifting, moving in the poetic 'power of the continuum'.<sup>13</sup>

Through this intersection of signs, intertextuality becomes definable as a 'dialogue among many writings'. When texts interrelate the author enters into a condition of co-authorship or co-being, so that self and other become indistinguishable, and the position in which outsideness leads to objectivity and clarity of perception is forfeited:

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<sup>13</sup> Kristeva argues that 'it is...impossible to formalize poetic language according to existing logical (scientific) procedures without distorting it. A literary semiotics must be developed on the basis of a *poetic logic* where the concept of the *power of the continuum* would embody the 0-2 interval, a continuity where 0 denotes and 1 is implicitly transgressed' (Kristeva, 1986, p.41). For a fuller account see Kristeva, 1986, pp.39-43.

Existence is *sobytie sobytiya*, the event of co-being; it is a vast web of interconnections each and all of which are linked as participants in an event whose totality is so immense that no single one of us can ever know it. That event manifests itself in the form of a constant, ceaseless creation and exchange of meaning. (Holquist, 1990, p.41)

The web image here emphasises the sheer plurality and intricacy of the assimilative process by which the totality of an 'event' becomes (to adopt a phrase Lawrence used to describe the cosmos) 'dazzlingly and gaspingly complex'. This complexity is analogously reflected in Derrida's sense of a differential network or textual fabric:

a 'text'...is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines)... (Derrida, 1979, pp.83-4)

The concept of traces woven into a fabric undermines a holistic definition of 'text', and replaces it with a sense of the endlessly deferring, extending and referential nature of the writing process.

In intertextual terms, poetic language achieves a 'constant, ceaseless creation and exchange of meaning' through the 'joining of two [or more] sign-systems', thus eluding fixity and entering into the flux of 'infinite reworking' or the 'eternal joy of becoming':

a text can come into contact with any other system: the inter-text is subject to no law but the infinitude of its reprises.  
(Barthes, 1996, p.211)

The emphasis on 'infinite' engagement, progression and regeneration may well be related to Derrida's concept of deferral, in which signs endlessly gather and acquire new resonances and implications, forming new links and operating within an ever-widening field of signification. Barthes also employs the term



'infinite' when considering the nature of intertextuality, and the trace of a text within a text (I give Diana Knight's translation here):

we might make our way back towards the idea of a *text*: a fragment of infinite language which doesn't recount anything but which is crossed by 'something unprecedented and murky'. (Knight, 1990, p.98) <sup>14</sup>

Here, Barthes makes the radical statement that texts do not recount meanings: they simply act as a crossroads for linguistic interaction. His interpretation emphasises the eclectic and endlessly deferring nature of a text, as well as the dubiously intangible, 'murky' character of the trace left as residue. Similarly, his conception of the writer as 'echo chamber' emphasises (as Bakhtin's heteroglossia does) that a writer/text reverberates with a multiplicity of resonances, becoming trace-ridden and chaotic.

If these definitions of textual chaos are accepted, it is necessary to recognise that there are infinite interpretative possibilities for the reader who first selects intertexts, then retrospectively projects his/her knowledge and experience on to the given material, as John Frow argues:

The identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation. The intertext is not a real and causative source but a theoretical construct formed by and serving the purposes of a reading. 'There are no moments of authority and points of origin except those which are retrospectively designated as origins and which, therefore, can be shown to derive from the series for which they are constituted as origin.' The prehistory of the text is not a given but is relative to an interpretive grid. (Frow, 1990, p.46)

While Kristeva argues for an intersection of textual surfaces and Frow for an 'interpretive grid', so Judith Still and Michael Worton assert that 'what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all the texts which the reader brings

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<sup>14</sup> The Barthes text reads: '[on peut] remonter vers l'idée d'un *texte*: fragment du langage infini qui ne raconte rien mais ou passe *quelque chose d'inouï et de ténébreux*' (Barthes, 1972, p.171).

to it' (Still and Worton, 1990, pp.1-2). Rather than acting as a detective and deliberately chasing textual threads to a single source (or to many), the reader engages in a productive or (it may be argued) simply self-serving 'cross-fertilisation', becoming an active participant in the intertextual process.

Texts (according to this reader-response approach) are thus laid open to infinite associations and resonances through their contact with a plethora of retrospectively supplied intertexts, so that they are ceaselessly recontextualised. In each new context they assume a new life, becoming (in Kristeva's terms) 'next-larger' to the previous sequences, rather than following in a progression of linear causality. The critic is given the freedom to move away from the restrictions of 'influence' based on source study, towards the interpretative juxtaposition of texts and an exploration of the laws and functions of methodological 'intertextuality':

Intertextual analysis is distinguished from source criticism both by this stress on interpretation rather than on the establishment of particular facts, and by its rejection of a unilinear causality (the concept of 'influence') in favour of an account of the work performed upon intertextual material and its functional integration in the later text. (Frow, 1990, p.46)

In this theory, there can be no single, compulsory 'response' to a text, as the process of cross-fertilisation will generate multiple, diverse readings. Instead, a reader can respond in such a way as to facilitate this cross-fertilisation and provoke divergent interpretations, in order to preserve the continuing freshness of the text in its new relation to retrospectively identified intertexts.

### *Intertextuality: source criticism or reader-response?*

I have emphasised above the reader-response approach to intertextuality, rather than the 'source-criticism' method which is perceived by many to be limited and outmoded. Yet one of the approaches to intertextuality that I consider most interesting is that of Michael Riffaterre, whose article 'Compulsory reader



response: the intertextual drive' hinges on a crucial issue regarding the source-criticism/reader-response paradox. Riffaterre asserts that a reader must have knowledge of the text(s) that have operated on the work studied in order for its (their) 'literariness' to be appreciated. Yet he acknowledges that it is sometimes only necessary for the reader to be aware that an intertext has functioned in this way and thus exists somewhere, rather than to acquire any detailed knowledge of the form and content of the intertext itself (see Riffaterre, 1990, pp.56-7). This knowledge can be acquired through an awareness of the text's unfilled gaps, and references with unknown referents. Riffaterre terms this awareness 'minimal reader response', arguing that it is driven - made compulsory - by the text, and that it demands readerly ingenuity for its decipherment. Riffaterre's theory is in part a reaction against other critics' tendency to resort to notions of ambiguity and deconstruction when confronted with difficulty or complexity. According to him 'when it activates or mobilises the intertext, the text leaves little leeway to readers and controls closely their response' (Riffaterre, 1990, p.57). Riffaterre's self-designated role is to 'try to determine which indices direct readers towards the specific and relevant intertexts, and indeed compel them to look for these intertexts even when cultural changes have made their recovery less likely' (Riffaterre, 1990, p.58).

As a previous quotation indicates, Sean Hand identifies shortcomings in the intertextual theories of Michael Riffaterre that are analogous to those he discerns in Bloom. He asserts that:

The same identification of origins turns Riffaterre's theories of intertextuality into a practice that relies on 'the reader's praxis of the transformation' undergone by a particular work.

(Hand, 1990, p.85)

In Hand's view, Riffaterre, like Bloom, postulates too simplistic a relation between poet and precursor, text and intertext, so that 'The critic's role is dominated by the rationalising force of interpretation such that the examination

of a particular signifying structure becomes the triumphalist decipherment of a previously baffling puzzle' (Hand, 1990, p.85). In Bloom's 'genetic chain' intertextual tensions are 'resolved'; while Riffaterre's 'genetical interpretation' of textual 'workings' operates through rationalist decipherment and examination. In Bloom's methodology, the reader must identify types of poetic misprision which can subsequently be assigned to a particular category; while in Riffaterre's intertextuality (as interpreted by Hand) one achieves 'resolution' by 'restricting oneself to a text-dictated segmentation, where one spots anomalies and eradicates ungrammaticalities' (Hand, 1990, p.86).

The resolution of ungrammaticalities inevitably presupposes a simplistic relation between text and intertext, as is made evident by Riffaterre's resulting generalisation:

As always in literary texts, a number of secondary signals ensure that even the most absent-minded readers will find the thread leading to the solution... (Riffaterre, 1990, p.65)

Here, the trace, defined as a thread, is seen to generate a clue that leads, through a detective process, to 'the solution'. The critic's role, defined according to this generalisation, must be that of a meticulous source- or gap-hunter whose task is clearly definable as the completing of an intricate textual jigsaw. This task will not be overly taxing, for (in Riffaterre's terms) the ungrammaticality will be 'So conspicuous a presence, and one so estranged from its context', that the reader will inevitably be compelled to 'search for its reason'. As this will be self-evidently unachievable through 'contextual justification', the reader will turn to 'outside associations for an answer' (Riffaterre, 1990, p.68).

It seems indisputable to me that Riffaterre is over-simplifying and idealising, through his holistic conception of a textual puzzle or maze: in Hand's terms he 'imposes the limits of coherence on the intertext' (Hand, 1990, p.86). Paradoxically, however, Riffaterre seems elsewhere to



acknowledge this to be the case, and proceeds to undermine his own expressed certainties:

However compelling this reading strategy may be, [i.e. the filling out of the 'text's gaps'] it cannot account for the actual identification of an intertext, since matching textual ungrammaticalities and intertextual grammaticalities is like trying to find a needle in the haystack of a corpus or of a canon, even if we assume that neither has undergone historical changes that may put them out of the reach of normal readers (that is, readers armed only with their linguistic competence and trying to make do without the philological crutches of footnotes and scholarly gloss). (Riffaterre, 1990, pp.57-8)

The 'needle in the haystack' image contradicts the clearly defined puzzle-solving conception of the reader, emphasising instead the arbitrary and probably futile nature of the detective process. Through acknowledging this arbitrariness, Riffaterre must afford a different status both to text and reader, and must accept that the reading process is not a finite linking exercise, but rather an infinitely diverse and divergent activity that will create multiple readings rather than a consensus that will support a sense of textual wholeness and stability:

The question arises as to whether intertextuality ceases to work if the reader is unfamiliar with the intertexts involved... Experience suggests otherwise. The cast emptied of its statue has many other variants. (Riffaterre, 1990, p.73)

This quotation's apparent open-mindedness is in part belied by its key metaphor: for the emptied cast had once been occupied by a single, clearly-shaped statue, even though it has vanished. Yet the quotation does suggest that Riffaterre acknowledges that in practice intertextuality is not dependent on a knowledge of (let alone an in-depth familiarity with) a prior text. Rather, the text becomes a 'cast' which may be refilled with diverse interpretations in spite of the solidly preserved shell-structure.

Riffaterre's article remains paradoxical, asserting as it does that texts represent puzzles that can be empirically resolved; that such resolutions are

futile (the 'needle in the haystack' image); and that diverse reader-responses are necessary and desirable. When adopting a Riffaterrian intertextual methodology it would be necessary to respond to and incorporate all these perspectives. Undeniably it is possible to identify some intertextual links, traces or threads through empirical, scholarly research, in such a way as to illuminate the process by which the poet in question has engaged with a precursor. Yet the process of detection cannot be exhaustive, and will necessarily entail its own limitations. An 'empirical' approach (perhaps one of the most profitable in the practice of analysing texts) combined with a productive scepticism and wider awareness is adopted (for instance) by Mary Orr in her book 'Claude Simon: the Intertextual Dimension'. Orr argues against the pure arbitrariness of a reader-response theory without foundation, saying that intertextuality 'is not the subjective response of a given reader who parallels one text with another'. She approaches her task in a way that correlates with Riffaterre's sense that empirical selection and identification is required:

The present study demands that there be evidence within Simon's *oeuvre* of his *own* reading of a specific text, and 'unsignposted' passages will be considered only if they occur in conjunction with sufficient proof that Simon is influenced extensively by that text elsewhere in his work. (Orr, 1993, p.33)

Orr's approach is not one that adheres blindly to the source-hunting method, ignoring postmodern insight into (inter)textual complexity. Rather it incorporates a careful consideration of its own methodology, acknowledging potential limitations and stating its claims thoughtfully and coherently:

Source-hunting is usually associated with the idea of authority: the quotations or echoes are used as touchstones, points of reference by which the new writer may orient his/her work as well as a means of transferring the prestige of the precursor to the disciple. The terms 'influence', 'source' and 'authorities' have acquired something of a stigma, and are now often considered to be outmoded in critical methodology; nevertheless these concepts still play an important part in any study of intertextuality. (Orr, 1993, p.9)



While Orr recognises the significance of the terms specified above, she is careful to guard against assumptions regarding conscious influence, direct exposure to a precursor, authorial intention and definitive readings (see Orr, 1993, pp.82-83). Her approach relies, rather, on the signposting and triggering signals she identifies as traces within Simon's novels. This approach is not, however, applicable only to prose, as is emphasised by Harrison's formulation regarding the identification of textual traces within a *poetic* text: 'readers are given guidance in seeking meaningful pre-texts for a poem that is demonstrably intertextual by the echoes and allusions embedded by an author in his text' (Harrison, 1990, p.44).

My approach to intertextuality in Lawrence's *Last Poems* will similarly rely on signposting, recognising that in order to provide a plausible account of a text's resonances and implications it is necessary to engage with as much as possible of the available evidence in order to provide the appropriate contextualisation of writer and reader. This contextualisation will at times be historical, cultural or psychological (as in Bloom, whose terminology I will at times employ); and it will involve the identification of empirically determined intertexts in order to discuss the nature of the intra-poetic relationship. Theories of intertextuality seem to operate most successfully when the process permits empirical selection and investigation, thus avoiding a situation in which their terms hang (to adopt a Lawrence phrase) in the 'vacuum of the absolute', without bearing any apparent relation to the texts to which they are purportedly attached. The relation between chosen intertexts and the Lawrence poems may then be explored using an approach that is not limited to the conception of linear influence, but instead adopts procedures and terminology associated with the diverse and often conflicting theories of intertextuality offered by such theorists as Riffaterre, Kristeva, Hand, and Barthes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In the postmodern theories of 'intertextuality' proceeding from the deconstruction of the old term 'influence', terms and sub-categories abound and proliferate, adopting diverse signifieds according to the particular theory/theorist. This is evident in the now copious vocabulary used to refer to the works that have been produced and appropriated. One



A crucial limitation of the empirical strategy must be recognised and addressed: 'no uncovering of allusion, trace or reference is ever exhausted—textual reverberations and reference-spotting depend on the vigilance of multiple readers' (Orr, 1993, p.176). No one reader can identify all relevant intertexts, even through vigilance. It is necessary to discriminate, to select the intertexts that seem to illuminate the later text most fully or interestingly. As no intertextual account can be exhaustive, it seems most profitable to be wide-ranging, exploring texts of different genres in order to investigate different

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instance of this is Gerard Genette's use of the term 'Palimpsestes' (or 'palimpsests' in its anglicised form) to describe 'texts that have been repeatedly reinscribed in discrete texts by new authors and are thus "saturated with history"' (Harrison, 1990, p.8). In one formulation Genette employs the term 'hypertextuality' in order to describe the interaction (defined as any relation other than that of direct commentary) between a 'hypertext' and its 'hypotext' (or prior text). Ann Jefferson's engagement with Genette's terminology exemplifies the way in which a theorist may adopt a prior critic's terminology, then extend it by introducing new terms, having identified its limitations:

In using the term 'metatext' I am borrowing from Gerard Genette's terminology in *Palimpsestes*; but as far as I know there doesn't exist a term to describe the relations between one text and another within the corpus (and more particularly between those texts which fall within the same generic category) of a given author. ... Since we are dealing here with texts that are 'from the same stable', I coin the term *sister-text* to describe the relation between novel and novel - and novel and autobiography when the latter is regarded as a continuation of the former.

(Jefferson, 1990, pp.110-11)

Here Jefferson coins the term 'sister-textuality' in order to describe the process of 'self-inter-referentiality' (p.177) in which a writer engages with his/her own literary corpus. Mary Orr similarly recognises the need for a term to describe this particular process, but employs a different term and implies that the category of self-quotation is often recognised and articulated:

Intertextual investigations often make the distinction between the quotation from others' writings and *intratextuality* or the process of self-quotation.

(Orr, 1993, p.3)

She describes the subject of her study (Claude Simon) as 'a major exponent of intratextual refabrication', acknowledging that her terminology derives from Fitch, 1983, p.85. These few quotations, in which the texts operative in the intertextual process are variously described by theorists as 'intertexts', 'palimpsests', 'hypertexts', 'hypotexts', 'sister-texts' and 'intratexts' reveal that the vocabulary associated with this field is subjective and non-standardised - and thus potentially confusing unless carefully defined when adopted as part of a methodology.



kinds of assimilation. Intertextuality emphasises that textual assimilation is not limited to works inhabiting a particular genre: consequently I will consider seminal works in the fields of anthropology, travel writing and cultural history as well as poetry. I will also emphasise the significance of 'intra-' or 'sister-' textuality (I prefer the former term), discussing those texts by Lawrence himself that seem crucial to an understanding of his late poetry, such as 'The Nightingale', *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, 'A Dream of Life' and *Apocalypse*. This intertextual study will subsequently entail a consideration of the extent to which *Last Poems* can be considered as a pre-death summation of Lawrence's life, work and creativity when the MSS were left incomplete, and when Lawrence's own intentions for the potential verse-book are unknown to us. This is however primarily a study of poetry rather than of theory, and I hope throughout to ensure that it is the poetry which remains the focus.

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## Chapter 2 Poetic Precursors: Two Early Romantics

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### *Shaping as weaving: poetic intertextuality spanning a life.*

In his essay 'Hymns in a Man's Life', written on 30 August 1928, Lawrence articulates his current conception of textual assimilation. He considers the 'shaping' of art and of life through textual contact, using the metaphor of weaving in order to describe this process:

It is almost shameful to confess that the poems which have meant most to me, like Wordsworth's 'Ode to Immortality' and Keats's Odes, and pieces of *Macbeth* or *As You Like It* or *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Goethe's lyrics, such as 'Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh', and Verlaine's 'Ayant poussé la porte qui chancelle' - all these lovely poems which after all give the ultimate shape to one's life, - all these lovely poems woven deep into a man's consciousness, are still not woven so deep in me as the rather banal Nonconformist hymns that penetrated through and through my childhood.

(Lawrence, 1968, p.597)<sup>1</sup>

This passage is interesting in many respects, as it explores retrospectively the way in which poems and songs assimilated in childhood are said to give the 'ultimate shape' not only to the structure of a particular later text or texts, but to the larger structure of the writer's life. The consciousness (as well as the art born of that consciousness) may be seen as a fabric consisting of the childhood

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<sup>1</sup> The vocabulary of weaving is, interestingly, also employed by Bakhtin in his dialogic theory of 'living utterance':

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.276)



traces which have been permanently and irrevocably woven into the cloth. The weaving process has nothing to do with the quality of the poetry: the Nonconformist hymns are described as 'banal' but are said to have penetrated most deeply into the fabric. Repeated exposure to texts (whether pleasure-giving or burdensome) results in a process of assimilation that begins in childhood and proceeds to give the 'ultimate shape' to an artist's life.

Influence as the 'shaping' or moulding of an artist's life and art (often rooted in or progressing from childhood) is explored by Thomas Mann in a way that correlates with Lawrence's approach in 'Hymns in a Man's Life'. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom quotes the following passage in which Mann draws a parallel between psychoanalytic infantilism and the process of childhood poetic assimilation that Lawrence explores above, explicitly considering the appropriateness of the term 'shaping' when employed in this context:

Infantilism - in other words, regression to childhood - what a role this genuinely psychoanalytic element plays in all our lives! What a large share it has in shaping the life of a human being; operating...as mythical identification, as survival, as a treading in footsteps already made!...I use the word 'shape' for to me in all seriousness the happiest, most pleasurable element of what we call education (*Bildung*), the shaping of the human being, is just this powerful influence of admiration and love, this childish identification with a father-image elected out of profound affinity. The artist in particular, a passionately childlike and play-possessed being, can tell us of the mysterious yet after all obvious effect of such infantile imitation upon his own life, his productive conduct of a career which after all is nothing but a reanimation of the hero under very different temporal and personal conditions, and with very different, shall we say childish means. The *imitatio* Goethe, with its Werther and Wilhelm Meister stages, its old-age period of *Faust* and *Diwan*, can still shape and mythically mould the life of an artist - rising out of his unconscious, yet playing over - as is the artist way - into a smiling, childlike, and profound awareness. (Mann, 1947, p.426)

Mann asserts that a 'father-image' - elected through affinity or love - can be instrumental in the educational process seen at its profoundest: namely the



'shaping of the human being'. This relates to Lawrence's claim for the 'lovely' poems (and by implication the creators of these poems) which, from childhood, mould and 'give the ultimate shape to one's life'.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence asserts that the poems are woven 'deep into...consciousness'; while Mann refers to the weaving as 'unconscious', and describes it (paradoxically) as both 'obvious' and 'mysterious'. Mann's psychoanalytic account of influence emphasises the problematic nature of the shaping or weaving of traces into the fabric of a text or of a life, which is operative within the artist at a subterranean level, until (according to Mann) it rises from the unconscious into some kind of awareness. This artistic 'imitation' has potential, through being playful, childlike and subversive, to elude definition and categorisation.<sup>3</sup>

Both Lawrence's and Mann's accounts, emphasising the significance of precursive 'hero' figures associated with childhood or regression to childhood, reveal the psychological complexity of the 'shaping' process by which art comes into being. A poem (for instance) - obviously shaped by the immediate circumstances in which it is conceived and written, and by its previous draft-stages - is also shaped intertextually and un/sub-consciously by texts assimilated throughout the poet's life. Lawrence's *Last Poems*, then, are not merely a product or extension of the texts that Lawrence was reading or re-reading at the time of (or immediately prior to) their composition. These poems

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<sup>2</sup> Although I am concerned with the similarities between the approaches adopted here by Lawrence and Mann, it is also important to be aware of at least one crucial difference. Mann implies that the election of a hero- or father-figure is discriminatory, resulting from affinity or love, even when the choice occurs at an unconscious level. Although Lawrence refers to specific hero-figures such as Keats, Shakespeare, Goethe and Verlaine, his emphasis (as I have argued) is on the indiscriminate process by which unelected Non-conformist hymns, characterised by banality and perhaps anonymity, become deeply ingrained.

<sup>3</sup> Riffaterre argues that 'generally speaking, we are justified in drawing a parallel between intertextuality and the unconscious, since the text plays the role of a screen. Thus the intertext is to the text what the unconscious is to consciousness' (Riffaterre, 1990, p.77). He accepts that there are similarities between reading and analysis; but as a result of his puzzle-solving approach to intertextuality insists that the 'intertextual drive...is tropological rather than psychoanalytical' (Riffaterre, 1990, p.77).



are a product, rather, of texts that have been read and assimilated since childhood. This perspective, slightly different from that offered in the previous chapter (involving multiple intertexts identified both empirically and through reader-response) has the same implication: that it is necessary when employing an intertextual methodology to be selective. This is particularly important in Lawrence's case, as he was always a prolific reader across all genres, and any attempt at a comprehensive study of his poems in relation to all intertexts would, of course, be futile. Apart from the necessity of selection on practical grounds, this process also enables the reader to prioritise. As I have said, Bloom argues that 'Every young man's heart is a graveyard in which are inscribed the names of a thousand dead artists but whose only actual denizens are a few mighty, often antagonistic, ghosts' (Bloom, 1973, p.26). The distinction he makes is too clear-cut; yet it is often possible to locate and name crucial 'denizens' who may be most profitably discussed.

This chapter, then, in which I proceed from Lawrence's identification of specific *poetic* precursors in 'Hymns in a Man's Life', will focus on only two poets, Keats and Shelley; while the next will consider Swinburne and Whitman. I have selected these poets from among the multitude read and assimilated by Lawrence on empirical grounds. Lawrence refers to these four poets both in correspondence and in his fictional writing: Keats and Whitman feature in the essays 'The Nightingale' and 'Whitman' (in *Studies in Classic American Literature*) respectively; while Shelley and Swinburne were both referred to by Lawrence at one stage in his career as our greatest poet. In discussing these seminal figures I hope to provide some insight into the way in which their poetry contributed to the shaping of a life, and specifically to the shaping of *Last Poems*.

*Consciousness in correspondence, and the dominant addressee.*

Keats' Odes feature among the poems which Lawrence identifies in 'Hymns in a Man's Life' as important in the 'shaping' of his life. In 1928 he is retrospectively considering poetry that was influential during his school years, while in the intervening years there are references to Keats in several letters, as well as more extended discussions in the essays 'Poetry of the Present' (written in August 1919) and, to a much greater extent, in the later essay 'The Nightingale' (written in June 1926). I will begin by considering Lawrence's conscious, expressed attitudes towards Keats as articulated in the correspondence and essays: it is possible to discern elements of a Bloomian affinity/antagonism which I will explore. I will then proceed to *Last Poems*, showing how Riffaterre's source-hunting technique may be employed when tracing textual threads or clues to a solution, revealing subsequently the limitations of this approach in practice and the need for a broader intertextual understanding of textual assimilation.

Keats is first mentioned in Lawrence's correspondence in a letter to Henry Savage, written on or about 15 November 1913:

A big man is big because his power, his horse-power or vital-power, is great – even Shelley and Keats, had terrific vital power.  
(Lawrence, 1981, p.101)

This remark is interesting, as it embodies a compliment to the poets mentioned, who had 'terrific vital power', as well as an implied disparagement: 'even Shelley and Keats'. It may be the lyric, Romantic genre rather than the specific poets mentioned that Lawrence is disparaging here: this sort of poetry is not usually considered to possess great 'power', and poets such as Keats and Shelley achieve such power in defiance of the genre. Lawrence seems, even at this stage of his life, to be reacting against the 'well-wrought' or 'finished'



nature of romantic poems, which he would later refer to as 'gem-like' poems of the past as distinct from the vital, vibrant poetry of the present.

A year later, Lawrence's attitude towards the restricted, 'unfree' nature of the poetry of Keats and Shelley has become more clearly formed, and is articulated in a letter to Amy Lowell written on 16 October 1914:

And don't talk about putting me in the safe with Keats and Shelley. It scares me out of my life, like the disciples at the Transfiguration.<sup>4</sup> (Lawrence, 1981, p.223)

The thought of being categorised, parcelled up and placed somewhere out of reach of the world as a perfected gem of the past seems to be in Lawrence's mind here, when he uses the 'safe' image, even though Lowell has presumably intended the comparison as a compliment. This quotation clearly foreshadows the essay 'Chaos in Poetry', in which Lawrence is to see free-verse as a way of cracking the safe and exposing the 'chaos' beyond the 'simulacrum' which shields mankind from the dazzling intensity of visionary insight.

Perhaps the most interesting explicit reference to Keats' poetry in the letters (and one of the few in which Keats is neither classed with Shelley nor adopted as a paradigm for Romantic Poetry) occurs much later than the examples I have previously quoted - on 4 January 1926 - only five months before 'The Nightingale' was written. This didactic and consolatory letter to John Middleton Murry uses Keats as an example of a man who mistakenly killed himself by attaching too much significance to his own writings, so that his entire existence was bound up inextricably with his art:

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<sup>4</sup> Amy Lowell's preceding letter to Lawrence is not printed in the Lowell-Lawrence correspondence. Lawrence, in the letter from which I quote above, has written:

We are also curiously awaiting your book of poems. You'll see me prowling through your verses like a bird of prey: and oh, the hyaena howl I shall set up when I seize on a lameness. You wait.

But for the Lord's sake, don't be modest, and say you'll listen to me. Disclaim me to start with, or I won't say anything at all.

(Lawrence, 1981, p.223)

My dear Jack, *it's no good!* All you can do now, sanely, is to leave off. *A la vie comme a la vie.* What a man has got to say, is never more than relatively important. To kill yourself, like Keats, for what you've got to say, is to mix the eggshell in with the omelette. That's Keats' poems to me. The very excess of beauty is the eggshell between one's teeth.<sup>5</sup> (Lawrence, 1989b, p.367)

The term 'omelette' presumably refers to the work of art that is the embodiment of beauty, while the 'eggshell' is the (frail) body of the mortal responsible for producing from within him this artefact. It is necessary, Lawrence implies, for the omelette to remain separate from the eggshell: once it has been externalised it should not affect the outer case which once surrounded it. Mixing the eggshell (the physicality of the writer) in with the omelette (his works of art or 'utterances') can be catastrophic, and may even result in the literal death of the author. Lawrence identifies the 'excess of beauty' in Keats' poetry as evidence that this mixing of mortal frame and created art has occurred. It is possible that he is alluding in particular to the critics' unfavourable response to 'Endymion', which had such devastating effects on Keats and precipitated the illness that eventually caused his death. Detachment is necessary for the preservation of one's mortal 'shell'.

Yet Lawrence's egg-metaphor reveals the problems inherent in the attempt to separate works from authors, shell from omelette. An eggshell is by nature very frail and easily broken. One is reminded of the 'worn sea-shell' used as a simile for the body in 'The Ship of Death', in which the resurrected human form seems to provide a fittingly delicate case for the 'frail soul' stepping 'into the house again'. It also must be remembered that the yoke and white of an egg cannot be extracted without cracking the outside shell: the egg has to be broken, to make an omelette. So even if the fragments of shell are not mixed in with the omelette, getting between one's teeth, the shell must be cracked into at least two pieces. Taken to its logical conclusion, then,

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<sup>5</sup> John Middleton Murry's book *Keats and Shakespeare* was published by Oxford University Press in August 1925 (see Lawrence, 1989b, p.322).



Lawrence's metaphor suggests that the writer is inevitably 'cracked' or broken in order for the beauty to emanate from within him.

It seems that Lawrence is counselling Murry to remain distanced, objective, in a way that he knows is impossible for any writer, himself included. Lawrence had recently finished writing his 'most important' novel *The Plumed Serpent*: the writing of which he believed almost killed him. In a letter of 29 July 1926 (six months after the letter to Murry), he admits the extent to which his own work and health have been bound up, to the detriment of the latter:

I am not doing any work at all: feel sufficiently disgusted with myself for having done so much and undermined my health, with so little return. Pity one has to write at all. (Lawrence, 1989b, p.504)

As a writer 'one has to write', in spite of a consequently deteriorating bodily condition: inactivity will be no solution and will undoubtedly provoke a more profound disgust. It seems that Lawrence's advice to Murry ought not to be taken at face value, as he was well aware of the impossibility of Murry - or himself for that matter - leaving off and remaining idle. Yet by adopting a stance of objectivity and rationality in relation to Murry's over-exertion, Lawrence is trying to stave off the process of association by which his own life and art may be considered analogous to that of Keats. In other words, Lawrence disparages Keats' entrenchment in his art partly in self-defence, for he sees his own life in danger of following a similar path. By 1926 Lawrence knew that he had tuberculosis: the disease which had previously killed the young Keats.

So Lawrence's seemingly 'objective' dismissal of Keats in the 1926 letter cannot be taken unequivocally as an accurate depiction of his attitude towards Keats at that time. There are numerous complicating psychological

factors, notably Lawrence's relationship with the addressee (Murry) and the didactic 'purpose' of the letter. Lawrence is issuing a warning to a man who has recently completed a book about Keats, and who identifies himself with his subject in a personal rather than critical way, thus 'burying himself', in a way which Lawrence feels has a detrimental affect also on his own relationship with Murry:

Murry came and was very quiet, and quite nice, but nothing between us. He's slowly burying himself, and hates to be disturbed. Can't bear to be away for a day from Abbotsbury. His Keats book is quite good: of course a golden image of himself, except he never wrote 'Endymion', and is so much the wiser. (Lawrence, 1989b, p.332)

Lawrence, in his letter to Dorothy Brett, is writing ironically about both Keats and Murry in a way that illuminates the purpose of his correspondence with the latter, in which he writes with the intention of demystifying or demythologising the golden idol that has become a reflected mirror-image for Murry himself.

Lawrence's deep-rooted motivation for creating a particular 'position' for himself in relation to a poetic precursor must also be recognised as a determining factor in his explicit writing on Keats. In Bloomian terms, Lawrence 'swerves' from Keats in order to avoid a biographical or biological identification, and in so doing produces astringent criticism which attacks poems such as 'Endymion'. While accusing Murry of an over-identification with Keats, Lawrence seems to veer to the opposite extreme, distancing himself through irony and adopting a negative stance. The positive reference to Keats' Odes in 'Hymns in a Man's Life', however, may suggest the possibility that Lawrence's 'anxiety of identification' (to swerve from Bloom's terminology) may result from an excess of youthful enthusiasm, and a need to move beyond Romantic lyricism to a new kind of poetry writing. This is a view supported by the essay 'Poetry of the Present', in which Romantic verse is



contrasted with the poetry of Whitman. Lawrence's writing on Keats in 'The Nightingale' offers a more specific critique, focusing on poetic detail yet manipulating Keats in a similar way.

***'Poetry of the Present' and 'The Nightingale': manipulation, clinamen and more hidden agendas.***

'Poetry of the Present', written in August 1919 as an introduction to the American edition of Lawrence's 'New Poems', aims to show that free-verse poetry is the true modern verse while the 'treasured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats' are associated with the past, as they belong to 'Perfected bygone moments'. New poetry, Lawrence argues in this essay, must reflect the transient, turbulent 'unfinished' nature of a world which is in constant flux and mutation:

Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished. Herein lies its transcendent loveliness. (Lawrence, 1936, p.219)

The term 'loveliness' is applied here, but not to the Romantic lyrics termed 'lovely poems' nine years later in 'Hymns in a Man's Life'. Loveliness, in 'Poetry of the Present', is attributed to poetry which is the embodiment of the 'inexhaustible, forever-unfolding creative spark'; the 'mutation, swifter than iridescence, haste, not rest, come-and-go, not fixity, inconclusiveness, immediacy, the quality of life itself, without denouement or close' (Lawrence, 1936, p.220). This kind of free, unfettered verse can be 'spontaneous and flexible as flame', and Lawrence cites Whitman's verse as 'the best poetry of this kind'.

In this essay Lawrence employs a nightingale emblem in a way that foreshadows the essay 'The Nightingale'; although the nightingale is here used for another symbolic purpose, and its song is characterised very differently.

Here it is made 'the voice of the past', an emblem for the kind of 'finished' poetry written by Keats and Shelley. The nightingale's song is characterised by 'the pause and the rich, piercing rhythm of recollection, the perfected past'. This association of the nightingale with the past is one that Keats has made in one particular stanza of his 'Ode to a Nightingale':

The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor or clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.  
(Keats, 1988, p.348)

In Keats' poem the nightingale is associated not only with a 'crystalline' embodiment of the past which has affected generations and remained unchanging, but also with 'fancy', poetry and the imagination. The narrator wishes to follow the nightingale by soaring on the 'viewless wings of poesie', and this association may have influenced Lawrence's choice of the nightingale as emblem for poetry of the past. In 'Poetry of the Present' the nightingale, in its embodiment of the perfected gem-like crystalline poetry, becomes associated with 'bygone life' (and by implication with death) as it is an emblem for the kind of poetry which attempts to 'fix the living tissue, as the biologists fix it with formation', so 'we have only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life under our observation'. The perception of the nightingale's song as 'death-paeon' may have derived from a specific association of the nightingale with death in Keats' poem:

Darkling I listen; and for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,



To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!

(Keats, 1988, p.347)

Significantly the song of Keats' nightingale is a death-paeon not for the bird itself ('thou wast not born for death, immortal bird') but for the poet, who longs for oblivion and cessation as a consequence of experiencing an excess of beauty.

In 'Poetry of the Present', then, Lawrence uses his nightingale-emblem in a way that seems to derive from his interpretation of the nightingale in Keats' ode at an early stage. His purpose is not to question Keats' representation or to explore in depth the implications of his chosen symbol. Lawrence, in adopting the nightingale consciously as symbol, seems in fact to be proceeding from an un/sub-conscious association of the nightingale with melancholy which derives from his earlier interpretation of Keats' Ode.

In his later essay 'The Nightingale', by contrast, Lawrence engages in a rigorous critique of Keats' Ode, challenging the portrayal of the nightingale and proceeding through opposition, antagonism, play and irony. This essay was composed in Tuscany in 1926, where Lawrence frequently heard the 'bright' sound of numerous nightingales in which there is 'not a hint nor a shadow of echo and hollow recall'. The contrast between the portrayal of the nightingale in the two essays is striking. The nightingale of the later essay is the 'bright flame of pure aliveness' that contrasts with the depressed poet because it 'never reflects'; while in 'Poetry of the Present' the nightingale embodies the 'pause' arising specifically from 'recollection'. In 'The Nightingale' the bird is 'rippling with its own perfection'; while in 'Poetry of the Present' it is the future not the past that 'ripple[s]'. In 'The Nightingale' the song is 'A kind of brilliant calling and interweaving of glittering exclamation'; while in 'Poetry of the Present' it is the 'immediate present' (not the perfected past) in which 'The strands are all

flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon' (Lawrence, 1936, p.219).<sup>6</sup>

In 'The Nightingale' Lawrence uses Keats' Ode as a contrary or a catalyst from which his own argument can proceed. He argues that 'Ode to a Nightingale' does not achieve verisimilitude in its portrayal of the nightingale; rather, it is an embodiment of the pathetic fallacy by which man grafts his own melancholic feelings on to another creature. Lawrence proceeds from a standpoint of incredulity and witty condescension:

How John Keats managed to begin his 'Ode to a Nightingale' with:  
'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my senses,' is a  
mystery to anybody acquainted with the actual song.  
(Lawrence, 1936, p.40)

This seems a forcible voicing of Lawrence's objection to the poem, yet an inherent weakness may be identified. Keats does not in fact begin his poem with the words 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my *senses*', but rather with the words 'My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains my *sense*' (my italics). The word 'senses' is chosen because it is more suitable for Lawrence's critical purposes, as it suggests that the drowsiness and numbness experienced by the poet-narrator have been caused directly by the effect of the song on the poet's ears. The 'numbness' would be paradoxically unsensuous and dull - an inappropriate response to the bird-song - for:

It is the brightest sound in the world, a nightingale piping up. Every  
time you hear it, you feel wonder and, it must be said, a thrill, because  
the sound is so bright, so glittering, it has so much power behind it.  
(Lawrence, 1936, p.40)

The poet-narrator's numbness would be the antithesis of the 'thrill' that (in Lawrence's essay) is considered to be the appropriate response to the

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<sup>6</sup> C.f. Lawrence's description of Birkin stoning the moon in the chapter 'Moony' of *Women in Love* (Lawrence, 1987a, pp.246-48).



nightingale's song. So the poet would be falsifying the effect the music has on his senses, by allowing his own despair to intervene.

Yet Keats wrote 'sense' rather than 'senses', which has a different implication. 'Sense' might suggest a condition that is cerebral rather than sensuous, so that the poet's *mind* is made drowsy precisely because his *senses* are so exaggeratedly awake to the bright sound. The narrator's *senses* cannot be numbed, otherwise he would have no capacity for being so painfully aware of the discrepancy between the nightingale's 'full-throated ease' and his own mute discontent. Lawrence does acknowledge that the narrator's forlorn-ness is attributable to the discrepancy I have mentioned:

There is not a hint nor a shadow of echo and hollow recall. Nothing at  
all like a hollow bell! Nothing in the world so unforlorn.

Perhaps that is what made Keats straightway feel forlorn.

(Lawrence, 1936, p.40)

The nightingale is unforlorn, so the narrator's own forlorn state is heightened by comparison. Yet it seems to me impossible that this contrast could be recognised by the narrator, this gap acknowledged, if his senses rather than his sense were drowsy.

As Lawrence changes 'sense' to 'senses', it seems that he is making the text under consideration subservient to his own interpretative purposes. Even if the substitution of 'senses' for 'sense' is attributed merely to carelessness, the misreading and misquoting alerts the reader to an important point in Lawrence's analysis. Lawrence was so familiar with this poem that he was probably quoting from memory, rather than directly from the text. In keeping with this approach he does not adopt a scholarly tone; rather, he uses a flippant, humorous style in which (for example) Keats' nightingale is given a chance to respond to the human observer:

'What? What? What, John? Heart aches and a drowsy numbness  
pains? Tra-la-la! Tri-li-lilylilylilylily!' (Lawrence, 1936, p.40)

The nightingale, says Lawrence, would 'fall off the bough with amazement' if it could hear and understand the human's response to its song.

Significantly (and perhaps oddly, when it is considered that Lawrence criticises Keats on the grounds of his inaccurate portrayal) the unsad nightingale which Lawrence places in contrast with the sad nightingale of Keats is envisaged in human terms: 'He just feels life-perfect, and he trills it out—shouts, jugs, gurgles, trills, gives long, mock plaintiff [sic.] calls, makes declarations, assertions, and triumphs; but he never reflects. It is pure music, in so far as you could never put words to it' (Lawrence, 1936, p.42). The nightingale, whose song is a 'pure assertion', takes on a symbolic resonance: it begins to embody the 'pristine assertiveness' and vitality that characterise great men, and great poets. Keats' sad nightingale, which Lawrence perhaps considered emblematic of the romantically melancholic Keats, serves as a useful contrast with the assertiveness of his own. However, it seems that Lawrence is misreading Keats in the interests of creating his desired dichotomy. For Keats' nightingale is a 'light-winged Dryad' that has never known weariness, fever, fret; and which has consequently never experienced the melancholy that Lawrence believes Keats to have projected onto it. (The only suggestion that the nightingale is in any sense melancholy is in the phrase 'plaintive anthem', which can be accounted for as it occurs during the *subjective utterance* of the narrator as the bird flies away.)

In his analysis of 'Ode to a Nightingale' Lawrence conveniently allies Keats' nightingale with the nightingale of Greek myth, about which he asks the following:

And why the Greeks said he, or she, was sobbing in a bush for a lost lover, again I don't know. 'Jug-jug-jug!' say the medieval writers, to represent the rolling of the little balls of lightning in the nightingale's throat. A wild, rich sound, richer than the eyes in a peacock's tail:



And the bright brown nightingale, amorous,  
Is half assuaged for Itylus.

(Lawrence, 1936, p.40)

The quotation here is from Swinburne's *Atlanta in Calydon*. Lawrence seems to identify in it a correction of the Greek portrayal of the nightingale in the myth of Philomela, so he uses the quotation to 'correct' both Greek mythology and Keats himself. Lawrence's tone here is flippant, in order to reveal the ludicrousness of the old Greek portrayal: he says that only a person whose ears are upside-down can imagine that a nightingale is sobbing. It seems in fact that Lawrence's unsad, bright nightingale stands more plausibly in opposition to the Greeks' sobbing nightingale than to the 'light-winged, 'happy' nightingale of Keats. It is also through alluding to Greek mythology, in which creatures are metamorphosed into humans and vice-versa, that Lawrence is able to elaborate on the symbolic significance of his own 'bright', purely assertive nightingale. The music made by the nightingale becomes a 'male sound' (it is the male bird that sings) embodying the 'pure splendidence of vocal assertion', and is later referred to as 'Caruso at his jauntiest'. This conception of the nightingale as embodiment of the 'bird-like' (and therefore presumably human), 'bursting, miraculous energy of song' seems a natural progression from the antithesis in which it is set against the uglily sobbing nightingale of the Greeks. More surprising, perhaps, is the way in which the nightingale becomes the paradigm for a human relationship - a unison within separateness - in which the female's role is defined in relation to that of the male counterpart. This symbolic 'role' becomes the focus of the last section of the essay, and is therefore given prominence:

Of course, the nightingale is utterly unconscious of the little dim hen, while he sings. And he never mentions her name. But she knows well enough that the song is half her; just as she knows the eggs are half him. And just as she doesn't want him coming in and putting a heavy foot down on her little bunch of eggs, he doesn't want her

poking into his song, and fussing over it, and mussing it up. Every man to his trade, and every woman to hers.

(Lawrence, 1936, p.44)

The nightingales have become a human couple who are deeply bonded yet remain separate, thus preserving their integrity and avoiding interference in each other's sphere.<sup>7</sup> The bond that unites them is an unconscious unison which yet embodies a deep-rooted awareness of the other as a 'half', without ever being a claustrophobic 'fatal halfness'.

It seems astonishing, however, that a piece of writing on Keats has culminated in the aphorism: 'Every man to his trade, and every woman to hers'. Lawrence does move back to the poem after this by quoting two of the last lines, yet the quotation bears no relation to the preceding paragraph. It is evident that Lawrence has used the poem merely as a starting-point (and an ending-point) from which to develop his own ideas. The last line of all - 'But don't try to argue with a poet' - seems to some extent a retrospective justification of his approach. Lawrence is not 'arguing' with Keats in order to prove him wrong: rather he is engaging with him in order to develop his own argument. He uses Keats as a Contrary, from which he may progress into a symbolic exploration of his subject.

Lawrence's short piece is, after all, about nightingales rather than poetry: it is the bright song of the Tuscan birds which provoked the 'act of attention' (see Lawrence, 1936, p.259) through which it came into being. Keats' Ode is introduced consciously by Lawrence as intertext through a process of association (the obvious nightingale connection). Keats is then manipulated and made to act as a foil: Lawrence interprets him in a way which is subjective and questionable; he misquotes him and uses him as a spring-board from which he can launch his own ideas. So Keats, rather than featuring as key

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<sup>7</sup> C.f. the exchange between Birkin and Ursula in the chapter 'Mino' in *Women in Love* (particularly Lawrence, 1987a, p.150). Like Birkin, Lawrence in 'The Nightingale' asserts equality but implies a satellite in orbit: a situation in which the male perspective is given and the female role is seen as irrevocably domestic.



preoccupation of the essay's conscious argument, seems instead to lurk behind it as an unconscious stimulant, apparently both positive and negative. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the attitude towards Keats is complex, elusive and even contradictory. For instance, Lawrence applies terms and assigns categories to the voice of the nightingale that he has also applied - here or elsewhere - to the voice of the poet. Lawrence refers in the essay to Keats' writing as 'such sad, beautiful poetry of the human male', while Lawrence's unsad nightingale (the antithesis of the reflective Keats) is made a paradigm for 'male sound' embodying pristine, pure assertiveness. Keats (in a letter previously quoted) is said to have 'tremendous vital power', while the nightingale's song here has 'so much power in it'. Dichotomies are constantly undermined; expressed views are frequently contradicted, either implicitly or explicitly. It seems wrong to assume that the essay, because it is written in prose and embodies an apparently conscious discussion of a precursive poet, is trustworthy. Lawrence warns against trusting an artist; and it seems that this caution is necessary in the 'Nightingale' essay, in which the author is revealed (in Mann's terms) as a play-possessed being. If the artist cannot be trusted in his expressed attitude towards an influential precursor then perhaps the tale can: yet not in the most obvious 'conscious' sense. The tale (or essay, or poem) must be interrogated at a more subtle linguistic level, so the process by which influential precursive texts have been woven in may be better understood. It is necessary, perhaps, not to trust the tale (in its obvious, semantic exegesis); but to trust the trace.

*The weaving process of intertextuality: traces, gaps, source-hunting and the role of the ingenious reader.*

The significance of Keats' poetry in the shaping of Lawrence's life and art is best understood in the context of the 'weaving', infiltration or intersection that results inevitably in the appearance of residual traces of various sorts in the fabric of a text. A letter written by Lawrence to S.S. Koteliansky, just after the

signing of the Treaty of Versailles, provides an example of the most easily discernable textual trace, in the form of direct quotation:

My dear Kot,

I haven't been able to write to anybody lately - simply stiffed with everything. However the PEACE is signed - sweet peace - Peace Perfect Peace - Pea - Pea - Pea - Pea - Peace: 'the very word is like a bell' - pah! (Lawrence, 1984, p. 366)

It is easy (in Riffaterre's terms) to spot the thread and chase it to its solution: namely Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Yet in spite of this easy link, and the brevity of the quotation, the intertextuality proves to be more complex. The Cambridge editors refer to the following works whose 'influence' appears to be emerging here: Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* V.i. 425 or *Richard II* iv.i.103; the well-known hymn 'Peace, Perfect Peace' (1875) by Edward Henry Bickersteth (1825-1906); as well as Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' l.71. Interestingly the influences identified here correspond closely with those specified by Lawrence in 'Hymns in a Man's Life', in which Lawrence refers to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to Keats' 'Odes', and to the hymns learnt in childhood.

The intertextuality is more complex than it might initially appear to be; yet the quotation still constitutes a trace that may be identified through source-hunting, even when the sources are multiple. Such traces (indicating direct correlation) are also evident in Lawrence's poetry; although they often appear in such a place or manner as to introduce ambiguity into the process of 'solving' or identifying them. For example, the poem 'Butterfly' (in 'Last Poems') ends as follows:

Will you go, will you go from my warm house?  
Will you climb on your big soft wings, black-dotted,  
as up an invisible rainbow, an arch  
till the wind slides you sheer from the arch-crest  
and in a strange level fluttering you go out to sea-ward, white speck!



Farewell, farewell, lost soul!  
you have melted in the crystalline distance,  
it is enough! I saw you vanish into air.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.8; 1993a, p.696)

The last half-line is a direct quotation from Keats' poem, 'Endymion', which incorporates the following lines:

Thou, Carian lord, hadst better have been tossed  
Into a whirlpool. Vanish into air,  
Warm mountaineer!...

(Keats, 1988, p.190)

Endymion, the Carian lord, is a 'warm' mountaineer; while Lawrence's butterfly-soul is departing from the 'warm' house of the body. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that in book IV of Keats' poem, Endymion is referred to as 'King of the Butterflies'. These parallels suggest textual intersection of some kind, and the identical nature of the 'vanish into air' phrases is undeniable. It is also undeniable that Lawrence was familiar with 'Endymion', as is made evident in his correspondence with Murry. However, the process of determining the nature of the textual interaction here is still problematic. It seems unlikely that Lawrence is consciously adopting a phrase from a precursor; it is possible that the concatenation is purely coincidental, resulting from arbitrary word selection within a shared linguistic field. It is also possible that 'Endymion' is a text that has been woven deep into Lawrence's (un)consciousness at an early age, and that its elements are likely to be subject to a process of recurrence through endless deferral. If this is the case, the resurfacing of Keats' poem in Lawrence's late verse testifies to the disparity between Lawrence's conscious critical evaluation of a poem and its unconscious potential for influencing and shaping his own work. Murry, says Lawrence, 'never wrote "Endymion", and is so much the wiser'; yet this remark is conditioned by a specific agenda, while the weaving of 'Endymion'

into the poetry written by Lawrence even in 1929 belies his conscious repudiation.

A textual thread or trace, once chased to a source, may provoke and give support to further *conjectural* links, through which the text(s) in question is (are) explained or illuminated. Arguably this is a reader-response approach to intertextuality; yet the perceived links are not arbitrary, as they are provoked by an empirically determined interrelation between specific texts. Once 'Endymion' has been identified as an intertext, for example, it becomes possible to find foreshadowings of 'Butterfly' elsewhere in the poem: foreshadowings which are as significant in revealing difference as similarity. One relevant passage is that in which the shepherd is led by a butterfly (described as a 'new-born spirit') into a 'solitary glen' in which there is 'never sound of mortal men', and beyond. This butterfly vanishes suddenly, and its disappearance is described in the following lines:

then high it soared,  
And, downward, suddenly began to dip,  
As if, athirst with so much toil, 'twould sip  
The crystal spout-head: so it did, with touch  
Most delicate, as though afraid to smutch  
Even with mealy gold the waters clear.  
But, at that very touch, to disappear  
So fairy-quick, was strange!  
(Keats, 1988, p.136)

Keats' butterfly stoops as if 'twould sip / The crystal spout-head', and is wary of 'smutching' the clear water (an image that might be identified as conventional or 'Romantic', as it suggests the delicacy of the creature and the clarity/purity of nature). Lawrence's butterfly-soul, by contrast, is content to 'sip the dirt on [the poet's] shoe': a line which Mara Kalnins sees as 'an unconscious reference to Whitman: "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the green I love / If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles"' (Kalnins, 1992, p.18). The Keats lines are closer, yet Kalnins' introduction of



another intertext provides a further poetic context, and suggests that no single reader-response connection is definitive or exhaustive. Also, by using the term 'unconscious', Kalnins emphasises the unwilling, indiscriminate nature of textual assimilation, through which poetry is woven into a writer's consciousness before emerging in his/her own texts. As poems by Keats and Whitman have been evoked separately as intertexts, the poem 'Butterfly' may therefore be seen as double- or many-voiced: it provides an example of the way in which a 'Romantic' image is exploited symbolically, its symbolic exploitation itself being informed by the 'unconscious' intervention of another influential poet.

Multiple intertexts can illuminate through contrast as well as correlation, as is evident when considering the ending of 'Butterfly' in relation to the final stanza of 'Ode to a Nightingale':<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the Keats intertext, three prose passages from Lawrence's own writing may reflect on the ending of 'Butterfly'. The first *intra*-text is an excerpt from *The White Peacock*, Lawrence's first novel. The passage is pertinent as it foreshadows the soul symbolism employed in 'Butterfly', and there is a striking correlation of images despite the fact that it is a bird rather than a butterfly being described:

The bird wrestled heroically, but the wind pushed him aside, tilted him, caught him under his broad wings and bore him down. He swept in level flight down the stream, outspread and still, as if fixed in despair. I grieved for him. Sadly two of his fellows rose and were carried away after him, like souls hunting for a body to inhabit, and despairing. (Lawrence, 1983a, p.82)

The second is also from *The White Peacock*, describing Cyril's response to seeing his dead father: 'He has glimpsed death, thus being transported fleetingly beyond [him]self as if [he] were a mere fleck drifting unconsciously through the dark'. Yet Cyril is able to resist the cold wind, called away by his mother's agony: 'I shivered, and came back to myself'. (Lawrence, 1983a, p.37).

The third is a letter to Murry written on 4 January 1926:

But I don't take myself seriously, except between 8.0 and 10.0 a.m, and at the stroke of midnight. At other seasons, my say, like any butterfly, may settle where it likes: on the lily of the field or the horsetod in the road: or nowhere. It has departed from me. (Lawrence, 1989b, p.368)

Here, Lawrence is purporting to give his 'utterance' a free rein, allowing it to depart from him in the way that he allows the soul to depart from him in 'Butterfly'.

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music - do I wake or sleep?  
(Keats, 1988, p.348)

Both poem-endings describe the flight of a winged creature into the air and out of sight. Yet although both poets imaginatively describe the flight of bird or butterfly - whether occurring or impending - there is a significant difference between the way in which the disappearance affects the poet-narrator. Keats' 'Adieu adieu!' is a despairing lamentation arising from his acknowledgement that his 'transport' will end as the bird-song fades. Lawrence's 'Farewell, farewell, lost soul!' seems to be analogously regretful, yet is qualified by the last line of the stanza: 'it is enough! I saw you vanish into air'. Lawrence's Ode, unlike that of Keats, ends with an acceptance of the lost soul's disappearance: an implied resignation, if not satisfaction.

The difference in attitude arises from the butterfly's symbolic role, which Mara Kalnins interprets:

The butterfly is clearly a metaphor for the soul; it is also a symbol of resurrection, of transmutation from one state in the physical world (the caterpillar and its chrysalis) into another (the winged creature of the air). The butterfly's movement is from the safe, warm, walled garden with its red geraniums suggesting the life of the body, the world of nature and of human consciousness, to the sea, the unknown, driven by a keen wind 'polished with snow', heralding death and winter.  
(Kalnins, 1992, p.17)

It might be expected that as the butterfly represents a *soul* whose departure involves a movement from the safety of the walled garden into the unknown, cold world beyond, the ending of the poem would embody more agony - and less resignation - than the ending of Keats' Ode. However, perhaps this resignation may be accounted for by exploring the implications of the



symbolism. One interpretation (tending to impose a moral or religious agenda) might argue that the butterfly-soul rises from the 'dirt' of mortality into a purer, spiritual, essence above. Another interpretation would be that the resignation arises from the poet's assurance that if he waits he will *inevitably* follow the butterfly's flight, for his soul must depart when the body disintegrates. The *soul's* eventual flight from the body has about it a kind of inevitability and conclusiveness, while Keats' longed-for elevation on the 'viewless wings of poesie' is merely a fleeting and arbitrary transcendence. A third interpretation might stress that the butterfly remains a *butterfly*, and that Lawrence is, ultimately, entirely unsentimental about its demise. The vanishing butterfly is therefore distinguished from the poet-narrator of 'The Ship of Death', who is 'cowering in the last branches of the tree of our life' and 'wincing from the cold', through fear of embarking on a journey into the unknown.

Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' as intertext, then, furnishes specific passages which may be usefully juxtaposed with sections of 'Butterfly'. The question here is not of direct quotation or a textual gap/ungrammaticality, creating a puzzle which must be solved by the detective-reader. It is a question, rather, of linguistic or contextual similarity, which enables the reader to pursue or even create connections and parallels. Moving beyond 'Butterfly' I will provide one final example of the way in which Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' may be profitably employed in the consideration of *Last Poems*. This example derives from the poem 'Shadows', and is interesting because Lawrence characterises a nightingale's song in a way which directly contradicts his portrayal in his 'Nightingale' essay. In this poem a nightingale is associated not with all that is 'bright' and 'silvery', but with darkness and shadows:

And if, as autumn deepens and darkens  
I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break in storms  
and trouble and dissolution and distress  
and then the softness of deep shadows folding, folding  
around my soul and spirit, around my lips  
so sweet, like a swoon, or more like the drowse of a low, sad song

singing darker than the nightingale, on, on to the solstice  
and the silence of short days, the silence of the year, the shadow,  
then I shall know that my life is moving still  
with the dark earth, and drenched  
with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.726)

These lines bear striking resemblances to Keats' 'Nightingale' Ode, although Lawrence's poet-narrator is placed in a very different relation with his surroundings. The poem is entitled 'Shadows', perhaps suggesting the 'shadows numberless' among which Keats' nightingale sings. In 'Shadows' the poet feels 'the pain of falling leaves'; while in Keats' Ode the poet refers to the way in which the drowsy numbness 'pains' his sense. Keats' line 'The weariness, the fever and the fret' is reflected in Lawrence's 'and trouble and dissolution and distress': both these lines reveal the painful nature of human reality from which it is necessary to escape. In Lawrence's poem the soul is subsumed into shadows, and a 'numbness' analogous to that of Keats' poet-narrator is experienced as a result. In 'Shadows' this numbness is an escape from 'pain', while in the Keats poem the narrator experiences heart-ache and pain as a result of the numbness. Yet even in 'Shadows' the numbness, or 'swoon', is described as 'more like the drowse of a low, sad song'. It is interesting that the word 'drowse' is used, particularly in conjunction with 'swoon', just as Keats uses 'drowsy' in conjunction with 'numbness'.

Perhaps the Keatsian association is most evident however, when the soul is described as 'singing darker than the nightingale'. The bird-song, instead of being 'silvery', 'bright', purely assertive, pristine or flame-like is associated here with the folding darkness of shadows, just as, in 'Poetry of the Present', it is associated with the poetry of 'recollection'. In Keats' poem the nightingale sings among the shadows of an 'embalmed darkness' in which it is necessary to 'guess each sweet' as the bird and flowers remain 'unseen'. Then the phrase 'Darkling I listen' is used to describe the poet's assimilation of the music. Lawrence adopts the Keatsian (also Swinburnian and Greek) association of the



nightingale's song with darkness, yet invests the association with a new significance, for the darkness is made both necessary and desirable. It is only when the darkness of folding shadows is experienced that the soul can be 'moving still with the dark earth', and 'drenched / with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal'.

The desire to be 'drenched' in the oblivion of the deep earth is analogous with the desire expressed in the following lines:

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
Cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,...  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim -

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known...  
(Keats, 1988, p.346)

In both poems there is a desire to dissolve and forget, to retreat into the shadows numberless of oblivion. In Keats' poem the inherent dissatisfaction lies in the fact that dissolving is only envisaged as a transient identification, with an excess of beauty that will disappear and leave only a residual confusion: 'do I wake or sleep?'. In 'Shadows' the transient nature of peace on earth is also acknowledged, for the 'snatches of lovely oblivion' oscillate with the 'sickness and misery' arising from the 'changing phases of man's life'. Yet these changes are accepted, for the oscillations are responsible for producing 'new blossoms of me', and result in constant renewal:

then I must know that still  
I am in the hands [of] the unknown God,  
he is breaking me down to his own oblivion  
to send me forth on a new morning, a new man.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.727)

Oblivion here is seen as a transient condition that necessarily precedes newness; just as in 'The Ship of Death' Lawrence describes the final emergence of the soul as 'the cruel dawn of coming back to life / out of oblivion'.<sup>9</sup>

Elements of Keats' poetry seem, then, in some way to underlie Lawrence's writing in 1929-30. There are numerous examples not of direct influence in terms of clearly definable allusions, but of a subtler intertextual engagement, which challenges and relies upon the ingenuity of diverse, multiple readers. The intertextual weaving may contradict or subvert authorial intention, as in the case of the nightingale associated with darkness and sorrow in 'Shadows', after Lawrence's scornful attack on Keats in the 'Nightingale' essay for portraying the bird in the way. Often the (conscious) prose-writing betrays an agenda, as is evident in the two essays and several letters I have considered. The intertextual weaving, however, of which the poet is often unaware, may indicate a profound 'unconscious' identification.<sup>10</sup> In Lawrence's

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'oblivion' appears in Keats' 'Endymion', in which it is explicitly related to death and a melting process:

Apollo's upward fire  
Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre  
Of brightness so unsullied, that therein  
A melancholy spirit well might win  
Oblivion, and melt out his essence fine  
Into the winds

(Keats, 1988, p.109).

In 'Ship of Death' (the 'More Pansies' draft version of 'The Ship of Death') the soul lapses into oblivion only when the 'spirit's experience' has 'melted away' - once:

the oars have gone from the boat, and the little dishes  
gone, gone, and the boat dissolves like pearl  
as the soul at last slips perfect into the goal, the core  
of sheer oblivion and of utter peace,  
the womb of silence in the living night.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.68; 1993a, p.964)

Achieving the 'goal' - oblivion - is dependent on the dissolving process that Keats recognised as essential to an imaginative transcendence of the weary, fretful world: 'fade far away, dissolve' etc. In order to forget (or, in Lawrence's terms, to achieve 'utter peace') it is necessary first to dispose of all the vestiges of human existence: hence the melting away of the skirts of experience, and the dissolving of the ship equipped with oars, food, little dishes and 'all accoutrements'. Even in this draft version, however, oblivion is seen



terms, the creation of an 'utterance' is like a spasm, involving naked contact with *all* influences *at once*, which hardly suggests a regulated, discriminatory act. A similar Lawrence-formulation occurs in 'The Nightingale' essay, in which he quips:

You may know a new utterance by the element of danger in it. 'My heart aches,' says Keats, and you bet it's no joke.  
(Lawrence, 1936, p.323)

Lawrence seems here to be referring to newly created art (utterance of the present): art which is the product of a spasm, and still embodies textual chaos.

The reader of a chaotic text must be aware of the need to move beyond source-hunting or puzzle-solving, revelling in the freedom that allows him/her to select texts and supply contexts. In his essay 'Raptus Virginis: the Dark God in the Poetry of D.H. Lawrence', Christopher Pollnitz refers to the trees described in the poem 'Cypresses' as 'Foster-children of silence and slow time': the trees are 'Lawrence's Grecian Urn, teasing us out of thought into connection with the lost civilization and the living universe. They are also, as we shall find, a friend to man' (Pollnitz, 1986, p.124). Here Pollnitz is proceeding not from a specific allusion or linguistic trace in the Lawrence poem, but from a more general correlation - perceived by him - in the way in which the focal object/symbol (the Grecian Urn and Cypress tree) of two poems can affect human consciousness. An intertextual reader, it seems, must be ready not only to search but also to supply.

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as a transient state which precedes rebirth, as is indicated by the line 'but can it be that also it is procreation?'

<sup>10</sup> In Bloomian terms, an ephebe may repudiate a precursor, revealing a deep-rooted anxiety of influence. Yet the period of 'flooded apprenticeship' will have lasting effects, contributing to the shaping of the ephebe's life and art. Even the most profound anxiety and rejection will not eradicate the traces of an initial, passionate affinity.

*Following the starry Shelley.*

The full moon shines on the sea, which moves about all glittering among black rocks. I go down and bathe and enjoy myself. You never saw such clear, buoyant water. Also I don't swim more than a dozen yards, so I am always trying to follow the starry Shelley, and set amid the waves... (Lawrence, 1981, p.85)

This quotation is taken from a letter to Edward Marsh written in October 1913, when Lawrence was staying at Fiascherino, near the house at San Terenza inhabited by Shelley in the early 1820s. His attempt to 'follow the starry Shelley' - both to the bay of Lerici and then into the waves (at risk of drowning like his precursor) - might be taken as a model for the biographical identification through which Lawrence wished to engage with this Romantic precursor. Immediately a distinction between Lawrence's attitude towards Keats and to Shelley comes to light. Lawrence was deeply moved by Keats' verse and also by his plight as a man, yet wanted to resist a biographical identification: he had no wish to 'follow' Keats-the-man, treading the downward path of a consumptive poet who would die prematurely. The 'starry' Shelley, by contrast, died the death of a man of action: a death which was in no sense occasioned by his poetic vocation. While Keats failed to distinguish life from art - mixing the eggshell in with the omelette - Shelley, a poet largely neglected in his lifetime, nevertheless professed to have written with courage, retaining his own peace of mind in spite of neglect and censure:

But in this, as in every other respect, I have written fearlessly. It is the misfortune of this age, that its writers, too thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame. They write with the fear of reviews before their eyes...I have sought therefore to write, as I believe that Homer, Shakspeare, and Milton wrote, with an utter disregard of anonymous censure. I am certain that calumny and misrepresentation, though it may move me to compassion, cannot disturb my peace. (Shelley, 1966, pp.318-19)



Shelley here exhibits the Promethean stoicism that he is shown to possess throughout Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, a book requested by Lawrence in July 1916 and probably read by him before: it is certain that he knew of it previously. Shelley's literary fortitude seems the antithesis of Keats' crumbling beneath the pressures of hostile criticism.

Lawrence identifies the quality of starriness in Shelley both as man and poet. The term 'starry' is itself derived from characteristic evocation within Shelley's poetry:

Amid the splendour-wingèd stars, the Moon  
Burns, inextinguishably beautiful...  
In her mild lights the starry spirits dance...  
(Shelley, 1991, p.128)

Lawrence referred to Shelley's poetry on 17 December 1913 as 'a million thousand times more beautiful than Milton' (Lawrence, 1981, p.120), and was very conscious, when he was going to live in Lerici, that not only was he following the 'Shelley and Byron tradition', but that 'It might be good for my rhythms' (Lawrence, 1981, p.63). This jocular remark derives from a letter to Edward Marsh, and forms part of a correspondence in which an argument regarding poetic form adopts Shelley as a focus. Lawrence's correspondence with Marsh is useful in illuminating his attitude towards Shelley just as his correspondence with Murry provides crucial thoughts about Keats, yet the same caveat applies. Like Keats in the Murry letters, Shelley serves a purpose in Lawrence's correspondence with Marsh: he is adopted as a precursor-pawn in a long-running literary argument, and is manipulated accordingly.<sup>11</sup> It is necessary, for instance, to be aware of the role of Marsh as addressee when

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<sup>11</sup> The next line of Lawrence's letter to Edward Marsh takes on a personal note, referring to his own poetry in relation to his correspondent: 'I send you a poem ['Grief'] which you might like. If you do, give it to somebody to publish, when you've got an easy leisurely occasion' (Lawrence, 1981, p.120).

responding to Lawrence's ostensible views about poetic metre, formulated as a result of reading and attempting to scan Shelley's poetry:

I think I came a *real* cropper in my belief in metre, over Shelley. I tried all roads to scan him, but could never *read* him as he could be scanned.<sup>12</sup> (Lawrence, 1981, p.105)

Lawrence is writing here in response to Marsh's attack on his own poems (such as 'The Wind, the Rascal' and 'The Ballad of a Wayward Woman': see Lawrence, 1981, p.104) which he was forced to take seriously, as Marsh was a crucial ally and supporter at this time. His specific preoccupation with Shelley, however, betrays an unwritten assumption regarding this poet's superiority.

It is perhaps in despair at the insuperable discrepancy between scanning and reading Shelley that Lawrence forms this interpretation of the composition of lyric poetry:

It seems to me a purely lyric poet gives himself, right down to his sex, to his mood, utterly and abandonedly, whirls himself round like Stephens philosopher till he spontaneously combusts into verse. He has nothing that goes on, no passion, only a few intense moods, separate like odd stars, and when each has burned away, he must die. It is no accident that Shelley got drowned - he was always trying to drown himself - it was his last mood. (Lawrence, 1981, p.115)

This approach relates to, and differs crucially from, the assumptions regarding lyric poetry formulated through adopting Keats as paradigm. As in the eggshell-omelette image, the burning away of odd stars suggests that lyric poetry entails the literal death of the artist. Shelley's drowning is in this way made as inevitable as Keats' torturous demise, so that the letter again suggests the Murry subtext. Yet the 'odd stars' image seems to possess a dignity that the eggshell-omelette image lacks. Shelley's drowning, though

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<sup>12</sup> His sense that Shelley's 'starriness' cannot be accounted for in metric terms - as the poems when read defy scansion - leads Lawrence to recollect that the Latin scansion he engaged in, presumably at school and then at Nottingham University College, was 'a horrible fake'.



inevitable according to this formulation, is the death of a man of action rather than of a patient, passive long-sufferer. The 'moods' described are 'spontaneous', 'intense' and (by image-association) starry, suggesting an impetuous, flexible, ever-shifting sensibility. The term 'spontaneously combusts' in particular foreshadows the essay 'Poetry of the Present', in which poetry is seen to be 'life surging itself into utterance at its very well-head' (Lawrence, 1936, p.220).

It is possible that Lawrence is indebted to Shelley for some of the views regarding poetry expressed both in the essay 'Poetry of the Present' (written in August 1919) and also in 'Chaos in Poetry' (written in April 1928). It seems, in fact, that Lawrence derived his 'starry' conception of Shelley-as-poet from Shelley's ideas about poetry consciously expressed in prose, as well as from the poetry itself. In his 'Defence of Poetry', for example, Shelley writes:

Poetry...strips the veil of familiarity from the world...it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being...It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. (Shelley, 1966, p.295)

The film of familiarity resulting in a recurrence of impressions is strikingly similar to Lawrence's simulacrum-umbrella image in 'Chaos in Poetry', which must be slit by great poetry in order to reveal the 'chaos' of visionary insight beyond:

Man fixes some wonderful erection of his own between himself and the wild chaos, and gradually goes bleached and stifled under his parasol. Then comes a poet, enemy of convention, and makes a slit in the umbrella; and lo! the glimpse of chaos is a vision, a window to the sun. But after a while, getting used to the vision, and not liking the genuine draught from chaos, commonplace man daubs a simulacrum of the window that opens on to chaos, and patches the umbrella with the painted patch of the simulacrum... (Lawrence, 1936, pp.255-56)

Penetrating beyond the staleness of familiarity is the aim expressed by both poets. Bloom employs terminology to describe stale/visionary poetry which may be of use here. He refers to a Covering Cherub or 'demon of continuity', whose 'baleful charm imprisons the present in the past, and reduces a world of differences into a greyness of uniformity' (Bloom, 1973, p.39). He asserts that while 'Good poets are powerful striders on the way back', few have 'opened themselves to vision' (Bloom, 1973, p.36). Bloom's grey uniformity finds an equivalent in Shelley's 'impressions blunted by reiteration' and Lawrence's 'painted patch of the simulacrum'. The necessity of breaking beyond this uniformity to 'wonder' has provoked in Shelley the desire for 'newness', as expressed in a passage taken from his Preface to 'Laon and Cythna':

I would willingly have sent [this poem] forth to the world with that perfection which long labo[u]r and revision is said to bestow. But I found that if I should gain something in exactness by this method, I must lose much of the newness and energy of imagery and language as it flowed fresh from my mind. (Shelley, 1966, p.319)

The newness, energy, vitality and spontaneity of Shelley's poetry compelled Lawrence to recognise him as 'starry', and to admire and emulate him accordingly. Lawrence became a disciple of 'wonder', engaging enthusiastically in the battle against the Covering Cherub, trying to rend the veil in order to reveal the chaos beyond.

Paradoxically, however, in 'Poetry of the Present' Lawrence uses the imagery associated with liberated, spontaneous writing (perhaps derived from Shelley and previously attributed to his 'intense moods') to describe the poetry of Walt Whitman. Lyric poems, in this essay, are seen as fixed gems of the past, in contradistinction to the spontaneous, flexible poetry of the 'now'. This shift, revealing an apparent inconsistency in Lawrence's approach to the poetry of his most influential precursors, may be explained in various ways. One explanation is psychological/chronological: by 1919 Lawrence may have progressed beyond his initial passion for Shelley, or even - in Bloomian terms - swerved from an



initial infatuation and become preoccupied instead with another literary figure (Whitman). Lawrence's championing of Whitman rather than Shelley in 'Poetry of the Present' might then be seen as a shift into a newness distinct from that of the 'serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth' (Lawrence, 1936, p.220).<sup>13</sup> It is equally valid, however, to assume that Lawrence is, in his correspondence and the essays on poetry, writing according to an agenda; and that even the most apparently objective assertions are conditioned by the addressee/audience, and cannot be taken as a statement of opinion about the poet in question. As in the case of Keats it is necessary to proceed through a study of intertexts rather than relying on apparently reliable (therefore deceptive) yet contradictory assertions regarding affinity and denial.

***Sea-change: Shelley through a biographical intertext.***

I have already hinted at the significance of Trelawny's book *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, requested by Lawrence in July 1916 and previously known.<sup>14</sup> (In addition, on 16 July 1916, writing to Katherine

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<sup>13</sup> The subject-matter of 'Chaos in Poetry' would be appropriate in providing a literary parallel for this psychological identification/rejection process. This essay describes the way in which new, visionary poetry becomes - with increasing familiarity and reiteration - merely another patch on the simulacrum-umbrella with which man protects himself from chaos.

<sup>14</sup> In an early version of *Women in Love* (to be published by CUP as *The First 'Women in Love'*, eds. John Worthen and Lindeth Vasey) Lawrence wrote:

Oh God, what ignominy, Gerald's body lying there, a slack dead thing. The majesty of death! The complete ignominy of such death. A live dog is better than a dead lion? -Ah yes in the kingdom of the lower animals! But was a dead dog any better than a dead lion? And Trelawney living, was he better than a dead Shelley? No, Shelley lay dead in beautiful immortality of being, Trelawney lived and died like the animals, mortal.

(Lawrence, 1999, p.441)

Mansfield, Lawrence requested *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets* by Thomas De Quincey, available in the Everyman library: see Lawrence, 1981, p.633). Lawrence's seemingly implausible assertion that Shelley was 'always trying to drown himself', and his conception of him as a man of moods, may well be indebted to Trelawny's account, and in particular to the following passage, which is worth quoting at length:

I was bathing one day in a deep pool in the Arno, and astonished the Poet by performing a series of aquatic gymnastics, which I had learnt from the natives of the South Seas. On my coming out, whilst dressing, Shelley said, mournfully:

'Why can't I swim, it seems so very easy?'

I answered, 'Because you think you can't. If you determine, you will; take a header off this bank, and when you rise turn on your back, you will float like a duck; but you must reverse the arch in your spine, for it's now bent the wrong way.'

He doffed his jacket and trousers, kicked off his shoes and socks, and plunged in, and there he lay stretched out on the bottom like a conger eel, not making the least effort or struggle to save himself. He would have been drowned if I had not instantly fished him out. When he recovered his breath, he said:

'I always find the bottom of the well, and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell. It is an easy way of getting rid of the body.'

(Trelawny, 1960, p.49).

This incident is not quoted by Richard Holmes, whose biographical writing on Shelley can certainly be considered more authoritative. However, even if Trelawny's account were entirely fictitious it would be equally significant intertextually, as Lawrence must have read this passage. Shelley's behaviour as described by Trelawny may well be referred to as a 'mood': a fit of impetuosity

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The editors provide the following annotation: 'Edward Trelawny (1792-1881) who assisted when the body of Shelley was cremated on the Italian beach when it had been washed up, long outlived his friend and eventually published his *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858) and, greatly expanded, his *Records of Shelley. Byron and the Author* (1878). On 8 July 1916, D.H. Lawrence asked Dollie Radford if she would lend him 'that little book of Trelawny's, on Byron and Shelley' (*Letters*, ii. 625); probably Trelawny's *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, ed. Edward Dowden (1906), a reprint of the 1858 edition' (Worthen and Vasey, 1999, p.511).



in which a great man comes near to throwing his life away on a whim. Interestingly, in his poem 'There Are No Gods', Lawrence uses a simile that seems to derive from this account of Shelley's drowning. He refers to the gods that 'are not, or that are / according to the soul's desire' as being 'like a pool into which we plunge, or do not plunge' (Lawrence, MS1, p.38; 1993a, p.652). Shelley, lying at the bottom of his pool, was allowing his soul to fulfil its desire not to be. Consequently the Poet was acting with supreme, godlike indifference. This mock-drowning might be seen as more justifiably termed a 'mood' - a fit of impetuosity - than Shelley's actual drowning; even though Shelley's determination to put to sea with a storm brewing was itself perhaps the result of a 'mood' rather than a rational decision.

In his account of the actual drowning and its aftermath, Trelawny tells how he inscribed the following lines - taken from Shelley's favourite play, *The Tempest* - as an epitaph on Shelley's tomb:

Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange. (Shakespeare, 1988, p.1173)

These lines were evidently in Lawrence's mind when he wrote the poem 'Climbing Down' (in 'More Pansies'). According to the rhetoric of this poem - a satire on modern man - it is necessary to climb down from 'this idiotic tin-pot heaven of ours' associated with 'mechanised motion and emotion'. The poem contains the lines:

And those who do descend have got to suffer a sense-change  
into something new and strange. (Lawrence, MS1, p.48; 1993a, p.667)

Lawrence would, of course, have been familiar with the lines as they appear in *The Tempest*, and the correlation is too close to leave any doubt of the intertextual borrowing. It seems likely, however, that, after reading Trelawny's account, Shakespeare's lines would have carried with them the extra

association of Shelley's death-by-drowning. In addition, the original sea-change image arguably underlies Lawrence's 'The Ship of Death', in which the little ship crosses the 'sea of change', before the soul (after having 'gone / completely under') 'emerges strange and lovely'. If this is the case, then it may not be too far-fetched to argue that 'The Ship of Death' is, at some level, a poem about the sea-change undergone already by Shelley, and which Lawrence would himself undergo when his soul eventually follows his precursor into, and beyond, death.

A further correlation of imagery supports this supposition. A 'shell' is employed in 'The Ship of Death', in a way which may be related to the words spoken by Shelley after the incident described by Trelawny:

'I always find the bottom of the well, and they say Truth lies there.  
In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found  
an empty shell. It is an easy way of getting rid of the body'.

(Trelawny, 1960, p.49)

In 'Ship of Death' (the 'More Pansies' draft version), the shell image bears no direct relation to its usage in the words quoted above: it merely provides a simile for the 'convoluted shadow' into which the journeying soul is subsumed. However, in 'The Ship of Death' (the 'Last Poems' draft) the simile is very different:

The flood subsides, and the body, like a worn sea-shell  
emerges strange and lovely...  
and the frail soul steps out, into her house again  
filling the heart with peace.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.25; 1993a, p.720)

Shelley, in his words to Trelawny, refers to his would-be drowned body as an 'empty shell', while Trelawny later refers (through the epitaph inscription) to Shelley's drowned body (or shell) as one which has undergone a 'sea-change / Into something rich and strange'. It is possible, then, that Lawrence's 'worn



sea-shell' which 'emerges strange and lovely' is (among other things) the body of Shelley, which has undergone a sea change and is now ready for the soul to reinhabit, becoming 'An ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire' (Shelley, 1991, p.61).

If so, and if Lawrence's death-poem is also seen to be autobiographical, then he might be considering ways in which to 'follow the starry Shelley' into the waves by conceiving of death and Resurrection as a sea-change. Perhaps he was doing so in accordance with Shelley's assertion that drowning was 'an easy way of getting rid of the body'. Or perhaps he thought that the soul who could go 'completely under' (like a conger eel) might find truth at the bottom of the well.

*Poetic intertexts: 'The Ship of Death' and beyond.*

I have isolated Trelawny's book as intertext (specifically in relation to 'The Ship of Death'), and will now proceed to a wider consideration of Shelley's poems in intertextual relation to Lawrence's late verse. The following passage, taken from Shelley's 'Epipsychidion', for example, specifically foreshadows terminology employed by Lawrence:

I never was attached to that great sect  
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select  
One of the crowd a mistress or a friend,  
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend  
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code  
Of modern morals, and the beaten road  
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,  
Who travel to their home among the dead  
By the broad highway of the world, and so  
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,  
The dreariest and the longest journey go.  
(Shelley, 1991, p.130)

This passage has been adopted overtly by E.M. Forster as an epigraph to his novel 'The Longest Journey' (the title obviously using a phrase straight from Shelley's poem), creating the most obvious, unequivocal kind of intertextual link. A less empirically determinable link becomes evident on considering this passage in relation to all drafts of 'The Ship of Death'. In the typescript version of Lawrence's poem the phrase 'the longest journey' occurs twice, describing the passage of the death-ship over the last of seas, to the 'last wonder of oblivion'. Already the difference between the two poems becomes apparent: Shelley's 'cold oblivion' (used to describe an earthly state of neglect and isolation) contrasts with Lawrence's 'pure oblivion' (describing the wonder-goal reached after the long journey beyond death). Similarly, Shelley's 'dreariest and the longest journey' contrasts with the 'longest journey' also described as 'the last journey, on and on, so still / So beautiful, over the last of seas'. Lawrence has adopted the term 'longest', but has placed it in a very different context and invested it with a new significance. In Shelley's poem the term conveys the arduous, dreary nature of a 'chained' life that drags endlessly. Whereas in the typescript 'The Ship of Death' the sheer length of the journey, resulting in apparent stillness and absolute calm, makes it beautiful. Or, using Bloom's terminology, his 'Tessera' category might be applicable in this case, as Lawrence 'antithetically "completes" his precursor, by so reading the parent poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough' (Bloom, 1973, p.14). This terminology seems problematic, however, for several reasons. Lawrence's reversal of the implications of Shelley's terms may be simply a result of employing these terms in an entirely different context, rather than constituting a symptom of authorial anxiety. Furthermore, Bloom's approach, and the alternative which I have just offered, both imply a direct, conscious adoption of Shelley's terminology. It is possible that Lawrence is consciously deriving the term 'the longest journey' from the poetry of his precursor; it is equally possible that his use of the term derives merely from a shared linguistic or cultural context, without revealing a



debt to a specific individual. Theories of intertextuality rather than of 'influence' acknowledge and interrogate the interactions within this specifically linguistic context or field.

In 'Epipsychidion', the journey described is that of all the 'poor slaves' who travel wearily through life to 'their homes among the dead'. In the typescript 'The Ship of Death', Lawrence is concerned only with the plight of a single soul; yet in 'Ship of Death' the millions of lost souls waiting to launch out in death-ships become implicated. The longest journey is made more painful, more difficult:

Oh, it is not so easy, I tell you it is not so easy  
to set softly forth on the longest journey, the longest journey.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.66; 1993a, p.961)

In this second draft the term 'longest' retains some of its pejorative implications, as the dreariness of waiting becomes a main focus. The reiteration of 'the longest journey' in the above lines has an incantatory feel which emphasises the mysterious desirability of the voyage; yet the journey seems longer and the goal farther away on each repetition.

The millions of 'gaunt dead' stranded on the margins, having been ousted from life, are not 'poor slaves' in the process of travelling wearily home, for they are 'unable to depart'. They are caught in a half-state between life and death, and might feel compelled to ask, like the Phantasm of Jupiter in Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound':

Why have the secret powers of this strange world  
Driven me, a frail and empty phantom, hither  
On direst storms? What unaccustomed sounds  
Are hovering on my lips, until the voice  
With which our pallid race hold ghastly talk  
In darkness?

(Shelley, 1991, p.40)

According to Ione, these spirits have been led from the 'thin dead, / On new pangs to be fed'. The realm from which Shelley's Phantasms emerge seems to approximate to the margins on which Lawrence's spirits are trapped. Lawrence refers to them as the 'gaunt dead', and they are intent on torturing the living, just as the Phantasms and Furies torment Prometheus:

They moan and beat, they gnash, they rage  
they fall upon the new outcoming souls with rage  
and they send arrows of anger, bullets and bombs of frustration  
over the adamant walls of this, our by-no-means impregnable existence.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.67; 1993a, p.962)

It is the pregnability of our worldly existence which makes it so terrifyingly vulnerable, and the coinage 'by-no-means impregnable' may be usefully contrasted with Shelley's evocation of 'A city of death, distinct with many a tower / And wall impregnable of beaming ice' (Shelley, 1991, p.5). In these lines (from 'Mont Blanc') the natural scene described is awe-inspiringly hazardous as a result of its impregnability to human agency. Conversely, although Lawrence's city of life (also referred to as 'our tower' in 'Ship of Death') is protected by 'adamant walls', it is 'by-no-means impregnable', for the arrows, bullets and bombs sent by the stranded souls can skim over.

Furthermore, in 'Prometheus Unbound', Mercury refers to the thin dead as 'savage fiends' peopling the abyss, and orders them back to their home:

Back to your towers of iron,  
And gnash beside the streams of fire and wail  
Your foodless teeth!  
(Shelley, 1991, p.43)

The foodlessness suffered by the gaunt, gnashing dead is a preoccupation in 'Ship of Death'. The single soul preparing his own death-ship for departure must be sure to furnish it with 'oars and food / and little dishes, and all accoutrements / dainty and ready for the departing soul'. Later in the poem the



oars, food and drink acquire a symbolic resonance, as the soul is 'Pulling the long oars of a lifetime's courage / drinking the confident water from the little jug / and eating the brave bread of a wholesome knowledge'. In retrospect the thinness of Shelley's spirits and the gauntness of Lawrence's lost souls becomes explicable in these symbolic terms. The nourishment they lack and have lacked is spiritual rather than merely physical; consequently they are blown restlessly about the pendant world, never experiencing the utter peace of oblivion, or of post-oblivion renewal.

Interestingly, Mercury turns to Prometheus after having dismissed the 'savage fiends', saying:

Alas! I pity thee, and hate myself  
That I can do no more...  
(Shelley, 1991, p.43)

In 'Ship of Death' an analogous exhortation to pity takes place, but Lawrence differs in directing the pity at the gaunt dead (who approximate not to Prometheus but to the 'savage fiends'):

O pity the dead that are dead...  
Pity, oh pity the poor dead that are only ousted from life...  
Pity the poor gaunt dead that cannot die  
into the distance...  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.67; 1993a, p.962)

The pity asserted here is characterised by the magnanimity inherent in the 'universal benevolence' doctrine which Shelley learnt from Godwin (and which Lawrence certainly encountered in Brailsford's book entitled *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*, which he read in March/April 1915). Lawrence's lines, compelling the living souls to pity those who are hurling arrows, bullets and bombs back over the walls of life, take the 'universal benevolence' further than Mercury, in his pitying of Prometheus. Yet Prometheus takes it further still when he responds to the agony he experiences as a result of the Furies

torturing him by saying: 'And yet I pity those they torture not'. This, perhaps, is the passivity/love doctrine taken to absurd lengths: such torturing demands a response which is human rather than humane. In *The Rainbow* Ursula, after being slapped on the side of her face by her sister Theresa, virtuously turns the other cheek, only to find that she is hit again. She retires burning with anger, and is only made 'clean' by shaking her sister in a burst of healthy retaliation.

In my last quotation from 'Ship of Death', Lawrence's gaunt dead 'cannot die / into the distance'. In 'Epipsychidion', Shelley refers both to 'motion which may change but cannot die' and to 'thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die, / Folded within their own Eternity'. The phrase 'cannot die' is used by Shelley to refer to an eternal essence which is too vital ever to be extinguished. (An example of this would be the burning, 'inextinguish[able]' beauty cited earlier.) In 'The Triumph of the Machine' (a poem in 'More Pansies') Lawrence employs the phrase in this sense:

And at last  
all these creatures that cannot die, driven back  
into the uttermost corners of the soul,  
will send up the wild cry of despair.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.17; 1993a, p.624)

Here, the native creatures of the soul are emblematic of the life-spark preserved in human beings which prevents them from becoming utterly subservient to the principle of mechanisation. These creatures can be driven back but not extinguished: ultimately they will rise up and assert their sheer vitality in a gesture of defiance.

The sense in which these creatures cannot die is Shelleyan, yet in his poem Lawrence moves beyond the passivity advocated by this Godwinian conclusion of 'Prometheus Unbound':

To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;



Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent...  
(Shelley, 1991, p.64)

In 'The Triumph of the Machine', passive hope would be futile, an active revolution is called for in which the native creatures of the soul *must* change: the lark must trill down arrows, while the lambs must stretch forth their necks like serpents. It is necessary for them to 'rise like Lions after slumber', with the added problem that they are the few who must vanquish the many. It is necessary to become enraged - the white rage of an enraged swan - rather than to submit to the rage of others in the way described by Shelley in 'The Mask of Anarchy':

And if then the tyrants dare,  
Let them ride among you there,  
Slash and stab and maim and hew--  
What they like, that let them do.

With folded arms, and steady eyes,  
And little fear, and less surprise,  
Look upon them as they slay  
Till their rage has died away.  
(Shelley, 1991, p.75)

It is very easy, when reading 'The Mask of Anarchy', to be carried away by the rhetoric, and to forget that although after the fray Hope is walking with a quiet mien, she walks 'ankle-deep in blood'. Conversely, in 'The Triumph of the Machine' (admittedly a very different kind of poem) Lawrence resists idealism, for although the revolutionary overthrow of the Machine has occurred, the middle earth is still contaminated:

But over the middle of the earth will be the smoky ruin of iron  
the triumph of the machine.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.18; 1993a, p.625)

The creatures of the soul 'cannot die', yet it seems that they cannot live either, unless they arise to meet the silky glitter of a 'new day', and find a new world. Having the essence of inextinguishability is not enough: such essences may be 'Folded within their own Eternity', but only seem to exist in the idealist limbo of abstraction, without a practical location.

The creatures that 'cannot die' in 'Ship of Death' cannot die in a Tithonian sense. They cannot find peace, but are trapped on the margins, the enjambment after 'cannot die' effectively creating a poetic break which reveals the impossibility of their ever departing. In this they remain distinct from the single soul preparing for his/her swift 'flight down oblivion':

And launching there his little ship,  
 wrapped in the dark-red mantle of the body's memories  
 the little, slender soul sits swiftly down, and takes the oars  
 and draws away, away, away, towards the dark depths...

(Lawrence, MS1, p.67; 1993a, p.963)

This passage also suggests the imagery of Shelley's 'To the Night', from which Lawrence quotes in an early letter to Louie Burrows (Lawrence, 1979, p.64). The following lines in particular seem relevant <sup>for?</sup> (to) comparative purposes: 'Swiftly walk over the Western wave, / Spirit of night'; 'Swift be thy flight'; and 'Wrap thy form in a mantle grey / Star-inwrought'. The similarities and differences are equally significant: whereas Shelley's Spirit's mantle is grey but starry, Lawrence's soul's is dark-red, symbolising the last vestiges of earthly existence which will sink and be subsumed in the last of seas. The symbolic resonance continues in Lawrence's next stanza: the 'lurking octopus arms', 'strange whirlpools' and 'dead weed' become emblems for agonised memory, remembered greed and a life-time's falsity. His use of the mantle image, in particular, may be described as a revivification of a nineteenth-century Romantic image which - if used mimetically - would have been merely a well-worn cliché.



If, in 'The Ship of Death', Lawrence is 'following' Shelley in terms of literary emulation as well as through biographical association, then it is possible that he is following a starry poet following another starry poet, thus becoming implicated in an elegaic tradition, and spinning another intertextual thread. Shelley's elegy on the death of Keats - 'Adonais' - ends as follows:

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
 Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven  
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given;  
 The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!  
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;  
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.  
 (Shelley, 1991, pp.157-58)

Here, the journeying soul is borne 'darkly, fearfully, afar'; while in 'The Ship of Death' the soul sails 'upon the sea of death, where still we sail / darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port' (Lawrence, MS2, p.24; 1993a, p.719). The term 'darkly' has the same implication in both poems: it suggests the tentative, unseeing, nervous manner with which a soul faces the unknown (the term 'sea of death' is also used by Shelley, appearing, for instance, in the eighth stanza of 'Ode to Liberty': see Shelley, 1991, p.94).

However, whereas in Lawrence's poem the term 'darkly' suggests a journey that is entirely directionless, in 'Adonais' the starry Keats becomes a beacon to direct the ship.<sup>15</sup> It is in fact difficult to discern the extent to which Shelley's voyaging soul has control over the ship's movements: he is 'borne afar' (suggesting that he is a passive passenger), yet the beacon image suggests that the soul has some capacity for steering towards it (perhaps we ought to infer a beneficent pilot-figure, like the one who directs the ship in Tennyson's

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<sup>15</sup> In Bloomian terms, Keats is stationed as the Daemon, or Intermediary being, who will enter into the adept to aid him, thus enabling the elegist to establish a 'Counter-sublime' in relation to the precursor's Sublime.

‘Crossing the Bar’). Eternity, however it is to be reached, is conceived as a realm where poetic souls are fixed in radiance, made starrily immortal. In ‘The Ship of Death’ eternity manifests itself in a different way:

And yet out of eternity a thread  
separates itself on the blackness,  
a horizontal thread  
that fumes a little with pallor upon the dark.

Is it illusion? or does the pallor fume  
A little higher?  
Ah wait, wait, for there’s the dawn,  
the cruel dawn of coming back to life  
out of oblivion.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.25; 1993a, pp.719-20)

Whereas Shelley’s conception of Eternity is one in which immortals remain starry and separate, Lawrence envisages rebirth into worldly existence: ‘the cruel dawn of coming back to life / out of oblivion’. The conception of oblivion expressed in these two poems also differs significantly. Shelley considers ‘Oblivion’ to be synonymous with death-as-poet, so that the elevation of poets to immortal status must entail a belittling of oblivion: ‘Oblivion as they rose shrank like a thing reproved’. Yet Lawrence sees oblivion as necessary, as it is a state which must be passed through in order for peace to be achieved: ‘Swings the heart renewed with peace / even of oblivion’.

Lawrence’s new conception of oblivion is central to the process of change described not only in ‘The Ship of Death’ but also in the poem ‘Phoenix’. In ‘Phoenix’, too, a Shelleyan analogy suggests an interpretation which sees the rebirth described as that of a Poet. Shelley, whose ‘empty shell’ was consumed to ashes on a funeral pyre, had been the author of the lines:

As a young eagle soars the morning clouds among,  
Hovering in verse o’er its accustomed prey;  
Till from its station in the Heaven of fame  
The Spirit’s whirlwind rapt it, and the ray



Of the remotest sphere of living flame  
Which paves the void was from behind it flung ...  
(Shelley, 1991, p.91)

In this passage the 'young eagle' is made the emblem for a high-soaring poetic spirit; while in Lawrence's poem the Phoenix 'renews her youth like the eagle / immortal bird'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the Phoenix's immortality is that of the eagle who hovers 'in verse o'er its accustomed prey', taking its place in the Heaven of fame, as well as symbolising the reincarnation of a frail soul stepping back into its house again. The imagery of the following passage in 'Prometheus Unbound' may also be usefully compared and contrasted. Here, fire is identified with the hatred of the Furies, and a cyclic, violent series of rebirths:

Leave the hatred, as in ashes  
Fire is left for future burning—  
It will burst in bloodier flashes  
When ye stir it, soon returning...  
(Shelley, 1991, p.47)

In these lines hatred, rather than a golden bird of fire, has been burnt to ashes and left smouldering. The same sense of renewal is evident - but whereas in 'Phoenix' the renewal is positive and transcendent, here it is merely threatening. The use of the term 'stir' is interesting: in 'Prometheus' the fire must be stirred by the Furies in order for it to burst out again. In 'Phoenix', conversely, a very different kind of stirring takes place: 'the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest / with strands of down like floating ash'. This stirring is delicate and beautiful, the antithesis of the angry stirring which will provoke bloodier flashes. It also reveals the wonder of the Phoenix's rebirth, which is accomplished without external agency. The new small bird stirs: it does not have to *be* stirred.

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<sup>16</sup> C.f. Isaiah xl.31: 'But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint'.

I have been suggesting, then, that Lawrence's late poetry engages intertextually in a way that cannot adequately be described by using Bloom's categories: to employ only the terminology of 'anxiety' is to falsify an account of the intra-poetic relationship. It is interesting, however, that Shelley himself articulates a conception of 'transmitted effluence' that relates to yet differs from one (outmoded) meaning of 'influence' to which Bloom refers:

And many more, whose names on Earth are dark,  
But whose transmitted effluence cannot die  
So long as fire outlives the parent spark,  
Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.

(Shelley, 1991, p.155)

This 'transmitted effluence' may be related back to the inflow or emanation of 'ethereal fluid' flowing in upon later ages from the stars. (It is this inflow which infuses Shelley's poetry with - to employ his terms once more - the 'liquid joy of life'.) Shelley considered the specifically poetic effluence to be definable as the 'gleam' of words, which can be physically manifested:

'... A Power which comes and goes like dream,  
And which none can ever trace -  
Heaven's light on earth - Truth's brightest beam.'  
And when he ceased there lay the gleam  
Of those words upon his face.

(Shelley, 1991, p.86)

It may have been from Shelley's 'gleam' that Lawrence derived his own concept of effluence, in which men without life-spark can live from the 'transmitted gleam from the faces of vivider men': men who look into the eyes of the gods. The ultimate robotic nullity is 'the denial that there *is* any gleam' (Lawrence, MS1, p.36; 1993a, p.649).

In Shelley's 'gleam', too, Lawrence may have identified something of the expressed spontaneity which he aimed for in his own poetry. Shelley's line 'To tremble, gleam, and disappear' finds a precise equivalent in Lawrence's 'A



water-lily heaves herself from the flood, looks around, gleams, and is gone' (Lawrence, 1936, p.219). This gleam was not merely described in prose (such as 'A Defence of Poetry'), but was embodied in the verse itself, showing that Shelley was - at one time at least - a 'starry' spirit for Lawrence, identified by the later poet as visionary.

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## Chapter 3 Poetic Precursors: Two Late Romantics

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### *Swinburne and his intertextual lineage.*

Algernon Charles Swinburne is a fitting poet to be discussed here, not only as a consequence of his significance for Lawrence, but also because he reveals an awareness of the intertextual complexity of his own writing. In *Victorian Poets and Romantic Poems: Intertextuality and Ideology*, Anthony H. Harrison attempts to locate Swinburne in an intertextual tradition, and in the course of this cites Swinburne's own views regarding his relation to other poets. Harrison uses these ideas to substantiate his sense of Swinburne's self-conscious self-location in a poetic lineage, involving the desire to reanimate the spirit of the visionary dead:

Confessing only that he 'has the heart to follow' in the tracks of his precursors, Swinburne is determined to 'blow my living breath / Between dead lips forgotten even of death'. (Harrison, 1990, p.169)

Harrison also quotes a stanza from 'Ave Atque Vale', in which Swinburne refers specifically to the 'memories' and 'melodies' of a poetic 'spirit', which now 'throng / Veiled porches of a Muse funereal'. As in the above quotation, Harrison presents Swinburne's desired contact with these memories and melodies as intensely physical rather than as metaphysical, and finds it envisaged as a warm bodily grasp rather than as a meeting of spiritual essences:

These I salute, these touch, these clasp and fold  
As though a hand were in my hand to hold.  
(Swinburne, 1925b, p.48)



Swinburne imagines stretching his hand back through the ages in order to clasp the hands of his own precursors. This seems almost completely the converse of the motion described by Keats in the fragment of poetry 'This living hand' (discussed in Chapter 8), in which the 'living hand' reaches *forward* in time, beyond Keats' death. The hand in Keats is imaginatively held out to the future readers who will experience a strong urge to give their own blood to make the cold hand pulse again: a desire for reanimation analagous to Swinburne's intention to blow his 'living breath' between dead, forgotten lips, except that Swinburne's places him in a poetic tradition, not before a readership.

According to Harrison, Swinburne's conception of poetic influence exists in contradistinction to that of Wordsworth:

Supremely self-conscious about matters of literary precedents, debts, and obligations, Swinburne generated his own myth of immortality opposed to Wordsworth's, one reified uniquely from histories of poetic achievement and succession. (Harrison, 1990, p.178)

The Swinburnian conception of influence may contradict that of his precursor; yet what Harrison sees as the 'extraordinary intertextual relations between the work of two highly influential poets in the Romantic tradition' (Harrison, 1990, pp.181-82) reveal Wordsworth's vital significance to the later poet. In order to explore this intertextuality Harrison emphasises the need initially to consider Swinburne's 'epistolary references to Wordsworth'; then to proceed to the 'Commentary on Wordsworth in Swinburne's essays' which extends the initial understanding, while admitting that 'only analysis of representative Wordsworthian poems by Swinburne can fully demystify the ideological operations of Wordsworthian intertexts, especially the Intimations Ode, in his work' (Harrison, 1990, pp.181-82). This methodology - very similar to my own approach - reveals an attitude towards Wordsworth that shifts between denial and affirmation, appearing to encompass Bloomian 'anxiety' in its various kinds of congruity and incongruity.

Swinburne's attitude towards Wordsworth reveals the potential significance of an influence that appears on the surface to be negative. Harrison refers to Swinburne's 'concerted anti-Wordsworthian campaign' (Harrison, 1990, p.184), and emphasises Swinburne's emphatic rejection of what he identifies as Wordsworthian ideology. He also asserts that Swinburne's treatment of his precursor suggests constantly that - unlike Shelley, Blake and Hugo - Wordsworth was not one of Swinburne's masters. However, Wordsworth served instead as a 'negative' model' whose paradoxically positive 'evil influence' compelled Swinburne to take account of his 'perverse theories' (see Harrison, 1990, p.184). Unsurprisingly, it is possible to identify a contradiction between Swinburne's early essays and poems, which are in rebellion against the (then) tremendously captivating Wordsworthian ideology, and the last extended prose discussion and late poetry (notably 'Neap-Tide'), which reveal 'his all but complete surrender to that power' (Harrison, 1990, p.185). Swinburne himself asserted in his essay 'Wordsworth and Byron' that the direct/indirect influence of Wordsworth would only end when the English language was dead, or no living soul could comprehend it (Swinburne, 1925f, p.157). It seems that Swinburne's response was never consistent but veered between the positive and negative poles: 'In one breath Swinburne exalts the "sublimity and supremacy of his genius"; in the next he decries his "indomitable dullness and thickness of sense"' (Harrison, 1990, p.186).

Swinburne's response to Keats seems to have been analogously contradictory. When referring to Swinburne as 'surely the most intertextually protean of Victorian poets', it is to the 'frequent echoes of Keats' in his work that Harrison most alludes:

Not unexpectedly, these echoes most often emerge in passages of sensual or erotic description. Further, as with Rossetti, it is the later Keats whom Swinburne echoes, and he does so thematically as well as verbally. (Harrison, 1990, p.161)



Such thematic and verbal echoing reveals a profound intertextual engagement: an engagement which, I have argued in the previous chapter, is a more trustworthy indication of indebtedness than more self-conscious commentary. A consideration of these 'echoes' can lead to useful and insightful commentary: Harrison discusses at length, for example, how Swinburne's amatory poetry has behind it the Keatsian sense of 'beauty that must die' and the inevitable (tragic) association of love with death.

If Swinburne's commentary on Keats is identified as indicating a more superficial kind of intertextuality, it is still significant. His views are split between adulation and contempt, as he always held that Keats was second to none as a nature poet, yet wrote scathingly about his early work, as Harrison shows:

In his essay on Keats, Swinburne castigated all Keats's work before 1819: 'The *Ode to a Nightingale*, one of the final masterpieces...is immediately preceded in all editions now current by some of the most vulgar and fulsome doggerel ever whimpered by a vapid and effeminate rhymester in the sickly stage of whelphood'.

(Harrison, 1990, p.161)

Swinburne considered Keats a poetic 'Giant', yet felt that he was superseded by Shelley, who was a 'God'. Terry Meyers has argued that it is Shelley who fulfils one of Swinburne's most fundamental demands: 'the ability to perceive in sensation the spiritual power behind it, and the ability to express in sound the reality and the unity of both' (Meyers, 1978, p.290). In his 'Study of Thomas Hardy', Lawrence expresses a similar view, referring to the 'sense of conflict contained within a reconciliation', notably achieved in Shelley's 'To a Skylark', in which a unified conception of the bird results from an awareness both of spirit and body:

Shelley wishes to say, the skylark is a pure, untrammelled spirit, a pure motion. But the very 'Bird thou never wert', admits that

the skylark *is* in very fact a bird, a concrete, momentary thing.  
(Lawrence, 1985b, p.91)

Lawrence feels that a 'perfect relation between heaven and earth' or 'Two-in-One' results from the unity inherent in such a portrayal.

Meyers, however, stresses not the unity itself but the 'sound' through which it is articulated. If Swinburne is indebted to Shelleyan sound or music, Shelley must be acknowledged as a deep-rooted presence underlying the most distinctive aspect of Swinburne's writing, just as Keats underlies the poetry 'thematically' and 'verbally'. Of course it is impossible to separate the components of poetry and attach a specific precursor to a particular aspect: the intertextuality is always infinitely more complex. It is useful, however, when considering Swinburne as a significant intertextual figure underlying Lawrence's poetry, to recall that Swinburne's work is itself in complex intertextual engagement with his own precursors and contemporaries. It is particularly apposite, for the purposes of my study, that two of these influential figures - Keats and Shelley - were also of crucial importance to Lawrence himself.

***Correspondence: thought and sound of a fiery spirit; pairs of poets.***

I lie in bed and read [Swinburne], and he moves me very deeply. The pure realisation in him is something to reverence: he is...very like Shelley, full of philosophic spiritual realisation and revelation. He is a great revealer, very great. I put him with Shelley as our greatest poet. He is the last fiery spirit among us. ...There was more powerful rushing flame of life in him than in all the heroes rolled together. One day I shall buy all his books. (Lawrence, 1981, pp.653-54)

When Lawrence was writing this letter, on his 31st birthday, Swinburne had only been dead for seven years. Hence the reference to the 'last fiery spirit among us': he was a current literary figure (unlike Keats and Shelley who had receded into the past) with whom it was possible to 'come into touch'.



Lawrence considered him the last of a dying breed of Romantic poets - the last, and one of the best - 'I put him with Shelley as our greatest poet'. The two literary figures are oddly elided, they are not 'our greatest poets' but simply 'our greatest poet', as though the literary genius/spirit of the two has become composite: the poets are 'rolled together' in Lawrence's classification of them. Interestingly Lawrence adopts the term 'fiery spirit' for Swinburne, a phrase previously employed by Shelley when referring to one of his heroes, Napoleon. In the context of his writings on Shelley at the time of this letter, the equating of Swinburne's merits with those of his (and Lawrence's) early-Romantic precursor suggests (at the time when the letter was composed) an unqualified admiration and enthusiasm.

As with Keats and Shelley, Lawrence had been forcibly struck by Swinburne's poetry at an early age, and it continued to affect him throughout his life. The initial passion is evident in a passage from *D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record*, in which Jessie Chambers includes a poem of Swinburne's among those recommended to her by Lawrence in a fit of 'swift enthusiasm':

Sometimes when he had particularly enjoyed a book he would send it to me [Jessie] with urgent instructions to leave off whatever I might happen to be doing and read it immediately. In this manner he sent me Charles Doughty's *Adam Cast Forth*...Another time, in swift enthusiasm, he sent me Francis Thompson's essay on Shelley; and again there came [Swinburne's] *Atlanta in Calydon*, and my attention was directed to the lyrics of the choruses. (Chambers, 1935, p.119)

The Swinburne quotation in Lawrence's essay 'The Nightingale' to which I have referred does, in fact, derive from one such chorus of *Atlanta in Calydon*. It is interesting that out of the three works specified one is by Swinburne and another is about Shelley, as though the two are again connected in Jessie's mind; probably as a result of a connection made between them by her correspondent. An early passage from *The White Peacock* (condensed in the published version, so the Swinburne reference vanished, but incorporated by

Andrew Robertson in his notes to the CUP edition) suggests that Lawrence may also have read Swinburne to Alan Chambers:

It was then that we talked the easy talk of books and things; it was then I taught him songs and verses. I would go first, singing with all my breath: 'Love leads to Battle'— or 'The Two Grenadiers'—or some song of Schubert's, while he caught up the tune: he had a very quick ear; it was then I repeated to him Swinburne's lyrics, and Meredith's, till he learned them from me...<sup>1</sup> (Lawrence, 1983a, p.386)

Writing to Jessie, Lawrence recommends the 'lyrics' of Swinburne's choruses; then in expounding Cyril's education of George via literature and song he emphasises the 'quick ear' necessary when responding to musical verse of this sort. He equates the learning of a tune and the learning of a poem as if they were equivalent activities, suggesting that the 'education' process entails a familiarisation both with the music of music, and with the music of poetry.

References to Swinburne appear sporadically in Lawrence's letters from 1910 to 1921, and there is evidence that he is still infiltrating Lawrence's prose works as late as 1928 (in a way that can be empirically identified using Riffaterre's source-hunting strategies). As in the cases of Keats and Shelley the conscious allusions to Swinburne - particularly in the early correspondence - create an ambivalent picture of the precursor, showing that the glowing portrayal evident in the birthday letter to Barbara Low in 1916 must be qualified through awareness of context and circumstance.

Returning to the concept of agenda, in which a poet-subject is manipulated in order to fulfil a rhetorical or didactic function, we can observe that Swinburne is often adopted for comparative purposes, and discussed in conjunction with another writer. Sometimes this comparative role provokes Lawrence to more negative portrayals of his precursor. Writing to Rachel

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<sup>1</sup> The condensed published version reads: 'I would recite him verses as we went, and sometimes I would tell him about books. Life was full of glamour for us both' (Lawrence, 1983a, p.224).



Annand Taylor on 26 October 1910, for example, he brings in Swinburne tangentially along with Shakespeare in order to articulate some current views on poetic music:

I like *Rose and Vine* - but not so much as *Fiammetta*. The former are very choice and charming and curious and careful. But they are rather like the clothes a woman makes before her first baby is born: they have never been worn; they 'cleave not to the mould'. One longs for touch of harshness. And I don't like your arrangement of vowel sounds: it is not emotional enough - too intellectual. One can get good Swinburnian consonant music by taking thought, but never Shakspearean [sic.] vowel-loveliness, in which the emotion of the piece flows. (Lawrence, 1979, p.185)

The poetry described here seems (according to Lawrence) to follow the dictates of sense rather than of sound. It is a product of 'taking thought', of 'intellectual' rather than emotional exertion. Lawrence appears to be employing tact here and identifying technical causes for a kind of writing he considers self-conscious. 'Swinburnian consonant music' is brought in to exemplify the kind of poetic sound that can be produced by 'taking thought': the implication being that this 'music', though powerful, betrays a profound lack. This lack is explained by reference to Shakespearean 'vowel loveliness' associated with emotion and with the flux that Lawrence was later to identify as a feature of free-verse. It is striking that in a letter consciously extolling Shakespearean preeminence in the field of poetic sound/music, a line from *Macbeth* is woven naturally into the prose simile describing *Rose and Vine* as clothes which 'cleave not to the mould'.<sup>2</sup>

Five months later Lawrence, in a letter to Louie Burrows (of 27 March 1911), discusses Swinburne's poem *Tristram of Lyonesse* in such a way as to suggest that Swinburne can at times be utterly vacuous, lacking both music and 'thought':

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<sup>2</sup> Banquo, speaking to Ross and Angus about Macbeth becoming Thane of Cawdor, says 'New honours come upon him, / Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould / But with the aid of use' (Shakespeare, 1988, p.979).

I've been reading Swinburnes 'Tristram of Lyonesse'. Some parts of it are very fine, parts again are barren to excess, stretches of noisy desert. You musn't try to put too much thought into verse, as I often try, and - presumptuous contiguity - Meredith does. But to let your metronome go on ticking when the music and meaning is gone is tiresome. Swinburne is shallow. Do you know Merediths poetry - 'Love in a Valley' - and 'Woods of Westermain' and 'Modern Love': very fine indeed. 'Love in a Valley' is a bag of jewels, rare, precious as can be, and beautiful - but they want a bit of setting.<sup>3</sup>

(Lawrence, 1979, pp.241-42)

Here, thought is no longer associated with Swinburnian consonant music. Rather, Meredith is made the poet of (perhaps excessive) thought, with Lawrence following in his tracks as disciple. There is a manifest awe (perhaps tinged with amusement or irony) in Lawrence's 'presumptuous' self-identification with Meredith; while Swinburne is relegated to the position of a poet who can be criticised and dismissed at will: 'Swinburne is shallow'. By implication, here, the rhythm previously associated with the 'consonant music' arising from 'taking thought' is associated with the barren metronome that ticks on relentlessly after music and meaning have ended. This worthlessness contrasts vividly with the 'bag of jewels, rare, precious as can be' that characterises Meredith's poem 'Love in a Valley', with which Lawrence has probably just become familiar. This letter seems, in fact, to possess the enthusiasm that often results from Lawrence's discovery of a new denizen (to adopt Bloom's term): it reverses the 'anxiety' principle in revealing a joyful emulation which relegates all other considerations (in this case a new Swinburne poem) to a position of subservience, or inattention.

In 'Study of Thomas Hardy', written in 1914, Swinburne is again yoked into conjunction with another poet - this time Shelley - and made to occupy

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<sup>3</sup> As the Meredith poems mentioned have a rigid 'setting' in terms of formal structure, Lawrence must be suggesting that they require a *different kind* of setting. Perhaps the greater liberation and flexibility provided by the free-verse form (used notably by Walt Whitman) is implied.



one pole in a Lawrentian dichotomy. The dichotomy is that of the principles of Love (associated here with spirituality) and Law (associated with bodily existence and passion). Near the opening of this chapter I quoted the relevant passage on Shelley, in which Lawrence identifies a state of 'Two-in-One' or 'conflict contained within a reconciliation' in his depiction of a skylark. This conception of Shelley as unifier of spirit and body is interesting and paradoxical when Lawrence's earlier portrayal of him in the same essay is considered. Earlier, Shelley has been made a paradigm for the 'pure male' who is 'almost an abstraction, almost bodiless' (Lawrence, 1985b, p.71). Lawrence quotes precisely the same lines from 'To a Skylark', but produces the following commentary:

Why should [Shelley] insist on the bodilessness of beauty, when we cannot know of any save embodied beauty. Who would wish that the skylark were not a bird, but a spirit? If the whistling skylark were a spirit, then we should all wish to be spirits. Which were impious and flippant. (Lawrence, 1985b, p.71)

Here Lawrence asserts that Shelley is so transcendently spiritual (as well as supremely male) that he cannot belong to life; as is indicated in his purely spiritual skylark. This is a direct contradiction of the view offered 20 pages later, in which the skylark poem is seen to achieve a perfect unity, incorporating an acknowledgement of the bird *as bird*. The incongruous shift in perspective is characteristic, and emphasises the impossibility of assuming that any one 'attitude' offered by Lawrence (even within a single essay) is definitive.

Whatever Shelley's status in 'Study of Thomas Hardy', Swinburne's position at the 'Law' pole is unequivocal:

in Swinburne, where almost all is concession to the body, so that the poetry becomes almost a sensation and not an experience or a consummation...we find continual adherence to the body... .  
(Lawrence, 1985b, p.91)

Swinburne (according to Lawrence) emphasises the 'physical in everything', as is evident in his portrayals of the sea and marshes, and in his depiction of love always as passion. In this way, he overbalances on the side of Supreme Law, and denies Love. Having stated this, Lawrence proceeds to make Swinburne a paradigm for 'the poet' who emphasises Law in order to redress the imbalance he finds within himself and his vocation: for a poet hovers on the verge of death/dissolution, entailing loss of the body. Clearly, here, Swinburne is a tool employed by Lawrence for the purpose of articulating this Law/Love dichotomy. The contradictions evident in his writing on 'To a Skylark' reveal that neither Shelley nor Swinburne is the focus of Lawrence's argument: both poets are merely exemplifications of a hypothesis that is being offered and explored.

Even when Lawrence's portrayal of Swinburne in a particular instance seems consistent, it is usually possible to identify an ambivalence in his attitude. In his 1911 letter to Louie Burrows, for instance, parts of 'Tristram of Lyonesse' are recognised to be 'very fine', in spite of the predominantly negative tone. Such ambivalence is also evident in a letter written four years later (on 10 April 1915) to S.S. Koteliansky, after a period of illness:

I got up today, this afternoon – very limp and weed-like. I wrote to Eder all my symptoms and my ailments – he must cure me.

'I am weary in heart and head, in hands and feet  
And surely more than all things sleep were sweet,  
Than all things, save the unconquerable desire  
Which whoso knoweth shall not faint nor tire.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> George Zytaruk and James Boulton suggest that these lines are original poetry, but derive in part from 'The Garden of Proserpine', II. 9-16:

I am tired of tears and laughter,  
And men that laugh and weep;  
Of what may come hereafter  
For men that sow to reap:  
I am weary of days and hours,  
Blown buds of barren flowers,  
Desires and dreams and powers  
And everything but sleep. (Swinburne, 1925a, p.299)



I am so limp I could recite Swinburne. That is a sign of great maudlin.  
(Lawrence, 1981, p.317)

Lawrence asserts that to 'recite Swinburne' is a 'sign of great maudlin': perhaps there is even an implication (particularly in the light of previously considered letters) that in order to appreciate Swinburne it is necessary not only to be 'limp' in body but also in mind. (The fact also that Lawrence says 'I *could* recite' Swinburne suggests that he may have resisted the temptation to do so.) Yet by quoting Swinburne in this way, Lawrence belies (to some extent) this negative suggestion: he reveals a deep-rooted familiarity with poetry that he has clearly interiorised (he is almost certainly quoting from memory), and showing that Swinburne's lines effectively convey a sense of the weariness resulting from his current 'limp' state.

When considering Lawrence's assertion that the desire to 'recite' Swinburne is attributable to a maudlin condition, it is necessary to introduce as contexts other circumstances in which he read Swinburne aloud. In *D.H. Lawrence: The Croydon Years*, Helen Corke describes Lawrence's reading of a specific poem by Swinburne, actually quoting the poem in full as though something of the experience remained caught up in its lines, or could be provoked by contact with them:

He reads aloud to me the *Ave Atque Vale* of Swinburne—reads  
it as if it were a ritual elegy for H.B.M

Shall I strew on thee rose, or rue, or laurel,  
Brother, on this that is the dust of thee—  
Or quiet sea-flower, moulded by the sea—?

Not thee—O never thee, in all Time's changes,  
Not thee, but this, the sound of thy sad soul,  
The shadow of thy swift spirit—this shut scroll  
I lay my hand on, and not death estranges  
My spirit from communion with thy song  
Is it well now, where love can do no wrong?

O sleepless heart and sombre soul unsleeping  
 That were athirst for death, and no more life  
 And no more love—for peace and no more strife!

It is to me an opiate, this verse. I wake suddenly on a day  
 when David and I are wandering in Kentish hill country.<sup>5</sup>  
 (Corke, 1965)

This poem, containing the terms 'sleepless' and 'unsleeping' in a single line, associates sleep with a desired peace, as the lines quoted in the letter to Koteliansky associate sleep with a cure for weariness. This poem seems to be emotive rather than intellectual; and Lawrence's choice of it suggests that Swinburne was in fact a poet who might benefit from being vocalised. His reading of Swinburne to Helen is certainly not an isolated instance: Julian Vinogradoff (the daughter of Lady Ottoline Morrell) describes how during Lawrence's first visit to Garsington in 1915, 'In the evenings he read poetry aloud to us, mostly Swinburne' (Nehls, 1957, p.310). In a letter to Barbara Low of 28 November 1916 Lawrence makes a second request to the recipient to send him Frieda's book of Swinburne's verse, 'that I may read him in a loud and declamatory voice - it gives me great satisfaction'. He proceeds with 'I have read your volume loudly from cover to cover' (Lawrence, 1984, p.42).

It is in his correspondence with Barbara Low that Lawrence makes his most positive and extended declarations regarding the merits of a poet who was clearly among the most important to him. He wrote to her initially from Zennor on 30 May 1916 on the subject, with his first request for Frieda's book, which had been left at the Eders' house the previous Christmas:

Here it is rather lovely to read. And if you see Mrs Eder do ask her if she could send the Swinburne Frieda left at her house at Christmas. I love to read him sometimes, and books are really rather precious here. (Lawrence, 1981, p.614)

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<sup>5</sup> Helen Corke here articulates a conventional view of poetry as 'opiate': a conception of the power of verse that Lawrence does not emphasise.



Swinburne is here mentioned along with Dana, Melville and Thucydides (all crucial to Lawrence in 1916); but there are no conscious comparisons made, only an unqualified enthusiasm at the prospect of reading a favourite poet. It is the letter quoted near the beginning of this chapter, written by Lawrence on 11 September 1916, however, which gives the fullest, most enthusiastic account. This letter was written in response to a volume of Swinburne sent by Barbara Low to Lawrence as a birthday present, which explains in part the almost exorbitant admiration expressed. Lawrence's assertion that 'he moves me very deeply' seems directly to contradict the sense of shallowness, the lack of emotion, that Lawrence has attributed to his precursor. In this account Swinburne is seen as profound and even visionary, he possesses 'pure realisation', is 'full of philosophic spiritual realisation and revelation': in other words, the ultimate depth. He seems to possess in abundance the power that Lawrence believed Keats and Shelley had to struggle to achieve, in defiance of the lyric genre: 'There was more powerful rushing flame of life in him than in all the heroes rolled together'. Here Lawrence seems to reach toward a biographical admiration for Swinburne-the-man: Swinburne is stationed as hero in the way that Lawrence previously stationed Shelley, and Shelley stationed his own 'fiery spirit', Napoleon. This biographical slant is emphasised by Lawrence's indignant condemnation of 'the world' for ill-treating Swinburne: 'How wicked the world has been, to jeer at his physical appearance etc'. In this letter, Lawrence unashamedly becomes Swinburne's champion.

The urge for biographical identification - the urge to follow the fiery Swinburne - is further evident later in the same letter, which doubles as an inventory of the various presents Lawrence has received:

My sister from Glasgow sent me shortbread and Herodotus and Heinz pickle and biscuits and oat-cakes:...You sent Atlases and Swinburne - then the cake and sweets Frieda ordered. ...I *do* want to invite the invisible hosts to tea. I will have Swinburne and Shelley and

Herodotus and Flaubert: just the four, round the round table in the tower. (Lawrence, 1981, pp.653-54) <sup>6</sup>

The apparently odd desire to 'invite the invisible hosts to tea' (particularly strange in offering physical nourishment and sociability in the interests of incorporeal pleasure) is explicable in the context of the melange of birthday gifts. Herodotus is (as it were) sandwiched between shortbread and Heinz pickle, while Swinburne is mixed up with Frieda's cakes and sweets. Herodotus and Swinburne are of course obvious choices for the tea-party, as Lawrence has just received volumes containing the work of each; while Shelley forms an obvious pair with Swinburne, as earlier in the same letter the two have been elided into a composite 'greatest poet'. The inclusion of Flaubert is more of a mystery: although it is possible that he became paired with Swinburne through Lawrence's sense of him as possessing a kind of corruption and self-hatred,<sup>7</sup> while Swinburne possessed an inner perversity that Lawrence believed to be latent in some of his poetry.

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<sup>6</sup> See Frieda's addition to Lawrence's letter to Dollie Radford, 29 June, 1916:

We have taken the Murry's [sic.] house which is really two cottages with a tower built on – it will be primitive but nice! (Lawrence, 1981, p.619)

<sup>7</sup> See Lawrence's letter to Henry Savage written in mid November 1913:

They've all - not Burns - Baudelaire Verlaine and Flaubert - got about them, the feeling that their own flesh is unclean – corrupt. And their art is the art of self hate and self-murder. Flaubert gashed himself deliberately with every stroke of the pen. He hated himself. His mind was free of ideals of chastity, and his body supplied him with nothing but disgust. When he had a woman, he was never satisfied. It left a residue inside him, which went corrupt. The old artist burned up this residue to Almighty God. What is offered to God in all time is largely unsatisfied sex. Flaubert wouldn't have any God outside himself – and so he only felt himself inside unclean – full of rottenness – and he tried to burn himself up in a slow fire, as one might burn a thing one hates...But to understand Middleton you must understand the whole suicidal tendency that has overspread Europe since 1880 – half Sweden commits suicide – a great deal of Germany and France – it is the Northern races - Madame Bovary is Flaubert suiciding his soul.  
(Lawrence, 1981, p.101)



It is undeniable that Lawrence connects Swinburne with 'lurid' writing, with the kind of subject-matter that the contemporary public - buying books in a 'perverse spirit' - would revel in:

Therefore, if I was doing a *Biblioteca Mundi* I should calculate my public and realise that they are curious about the famous but not well known books in other languages: such as Stendhal's *Amour* or some Swinburne or Whitman: - things with a slightly lurid interest. But I *can't* see anybody buying Chaucer. People don't buy books in a *good* spirit any more: at least, cosmopolitan people dont. They buy them in a perverse spirit.

(Lawrence, 1984, p.680)

This letter (of 4 March 1921 to Dr. Anton Kippenberg) might provoke ambiguous interpretations: are Swinburne and Whitman sensationalist crowd-pullers, or is their fieryness attributable to the courage with which they tackle and expose thorny issues, particularly relating to sexuality? Whitman, notably in his 'Calamus' poems, writes about 'manly love' in a way that directly affected Lawrence's conception of homoeroticism, as portrayed in his correspondence, essays, fiction and poetry (I will consider the Whitman-Lawrence relationship at length later in this chapter). The Swinburne works quoted and discussed predominantly by Lawrence - such as *Atlanta in Caldon*, 'Tristram in Lyonesse', 'Hymn to Proserpine', 'The Garden of Proserpine' and 'Ave Atque Vale' - are not characterised by the lurid appeal to which he refers: this quality appears only in 'some' Swinburne and Whitman. Yet he must have been aware of the writing on lesbianism ('Anactoria'); male homosexuality ('Fragoletta' - a poem also implying bisexuality) and bisexuality ('Hermaphroditus'); as well as the constantly recurring theme of sexual aberration ('Erotion'). This 'lurid' aspect of Swinburne, appealing to the 'perverse spirit' of Lawrence's contemporary readers, is interesting in the light of Lawrence's later views on pornography and obscenity. Lurid literature can be giggled about in corners in a way that is purely debasing, while explicit sex-writing may attempt to undermine prejudice and provide liberation: perhaps this was one of the ways in

which Lawrence believed Swinburne to be a 'great revealer'. It is also true, however, that the man who deliberately published *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in Paris knew how to calculate his audience very well, with its taste for 'lurid interest'.

*Atlanta and Proserpine in Lawrence-text.*

I have referred to *Atlanta in Calydon* as a text to which Lawrence responded enthusiastically at an early age, as is evident in his recommendation of this specific text to Jessie. This poem exemplifies usefully the way in which a text assimilated early can resurface constantly and in diverse ways throughout the life of its author. I have already quoted from an early draft of *The White Peacock*, in which the reading of Swinburne serves as part of the cultural education of George, strengthening the youthful bond between the two male protagonists. The explicit mention of Swinburne was excised from the published version, probably because Lawrence considered the passage rather laboured and cumbersome through its specificity. However, although he is never mentioned by name in the final text, certain passages (or traces) suggest Swinburne as source, his poems as intertexts. For instance, during a love-banter exchange between Lettie and Leslie, in which the former tries to identify the kind of music that might be made by her lover, the two adopt the roles of Atlanta and Hippomenes:

'Like the calling of throstles and blackies, in the evening,  
frightening the pale little wood anemones, till they run panting and  
swaying right up to our wall. Like the ringing of bluebells when the  
bees are at them; like Hippomenes, out-of-breath, laughing because  
he'd won.'

He kissed her with rapturous admiration.

'Marriage music Sir,' she added.

'What golden apples did I throw?' he asked lightly.

'What!' she exclaimed, half mocking.

'This Atlanta,' he replied, looking lovingly upon her '—this  
Atlanta—I believe she just lagged at last on purpose.'



‘You have it,’ she cried, laughing, submitting to his caresses.  
(Lawrence, 1983a, p.84)

Andrew Robertson identifies Swinburne as the ‘probable source’ for Lawrence’s familiarity with the Atlanta myth, and cites Jessie Chambers’ memoir as evidence to support this supposition.<sup>8</sup> Lawrence might well have encountered the myth elsewhere; for example in the classical dictionaries through which he gained a vast knowledge of diverse mythologies at an early age. However, a letter written on 30 January 1911 (the very month in which *The White Peacock* was published) reveals that at least parts of Swinburne were sufficiently known by Lawrence to be appropriated and woven into spontaneously created prose:

So you are smitten? Now don’t have influenza, don’t.  
Tomorrow is your third day: I shall be ever so mad if you continue to  
be knocked up. I shall be telling ‘whatever Gods there be’ that they are  
a parcel of fools: which would never do. (Lawrence, 1979, p.224)

Swinburne’s ‘The Garden of Proserpine’ is the source for Lawrence’s quotation here: James Boulton also offers W.E. Henley’s ‘Invictus’, I.3, as a possibility (note 1; Boulton, 1979, p.224). If Swinburne’s poem was the/a source then Lawrence was changing the words slightly while quoting, as Swinburne’s line reads ‘Whatever gods may be’. This minor change is similar to the alteration of ‘sense’ to ‘senses’ when quoting Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, although the current instance does not have the same semantic

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<sup>8</sup> See note to 84:28: ‘Greek myth: Hippomenes, a suitor of Atlanta, accepted her challenge that whoever should win a race with her should marry her; those who lost should die. He dropped three golden apples from the garden of Hesperides which Aphrodite had given him; Atlanta paused to pick them up, and he won. DHL’s probable source was *Atlanta in Calydon* (1865) by Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909); see E.T. 119’ (Robertson, 1983, p.371).

implications: this seems to constitute a misremembering rather than an (un/sub-conscious) manipulation of text to suit Lawrence's purposes.<sup>9</sup>

*The White Peacock* and the letter to Louie indicate an early familiarity with and interiorisation of Swinburne's *Atlanta* and 'Proserpine' poems. The depth of this assimilation is revealed on considering that this evidence is not limited to an initial period of interest (in Bloom's terms a 'flooded apprenticeship') but continues in later fiction and correspondence. In a letter of 25 November 1916 to Lady Cynthia Asquith, for instance, Lawrence writes:

I must here assert again, that the war is, and continues, because of the lust for hate and war, chiefly hate of each other – 'hate thy neighbour as thyself' – not hate of Germany at all which is in the hearts of people; and their worship of Ares and Aphrodite – ('But a bitter goddess was born, of blood and the salt sea foam –') – both gods of destruction and burning down. (Lawrence, 1984, p.39)

The editor cites *Atlanta in Calydon* as the source for these lines, directing the reader to II. 729-30, 742: 'For an evil blossom was born / Of sea-foam and the frothing of blood...A perilous goddess was born'. The lines are sufficiently alike to justify the linking of Swinburne-text with Lawrence-text; yet sufficiently distinct to indicate that Lawrence was quoting from a thoroughly interiorised, slightly misremembered source. It seems also that Lawrence was misremembering through re-creating: in the phrase 'of blood and the salt sea foam' he employs a 'Swinburnian' rhythm. The quotation marks placed around the lines attribute them to a source, acknowledging a debt; while the inaccuracy shows that Lawrence, in recalling these lines from his memory, has un/sub-consciously possessed them, making them his own. The intertextual case is almost identical to that evident in the letter to Louie; the only difference being that the (mis)quotation is here more elaborate and extended.

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<sup>9</sup> It must also be noted that by 1911 the Swinburne phrase in question was culturally widely available - it had become almost proverbial - and therefore must not be taken as a definitive indication of Lawrence's familiarity with Swinburne's work.



While Swinburne's *Atlanta* and 'Proserpine' poems are appropriated and (mis)quoted in the letters, they can also underlie or illuminate portrayals of fictional characters, as I have suggested in relation to *The White Peacock*. While in *The White Peacock* Lettie briefly becomes Atlanta, in 'The Ladybird'<sup>10</sup> the identification of the heroine with this goddess carries a much greater significance:

But Daphne was not born for grief and philanthropy. With her splendid frame, and her lovely, long strong legs she was Artemis or Atlanta rather than Daphne. There was a certain width of brow and even of chin that told a strong, reckless nature, and the curious, distraught slant of her eyes told of a wild energy dammed up inside her.<sup>11</sup> (Lawrence, 1992b, pp.160-61)

Dieter Mehl, expounding Atlanta as 'a famous huntress who defended her virginity against suitors by forcing them to race against her' again attributes Lawrence's knowledge of (and partiality for) this myth to his familiarity with *Atlanta in Calydon*.<sup>12</sup> Daphne is also associated with Swinburne's Proserpine, through characterisation, via dialogue, and via quotation. Basil makes the explicit reference when he protests: 'Don't tell me your hands could die, darling: your wonderful Proserpine fingers' (Lawrence, 1992b, p.195).

Yet Daphne's explicit allusion to Swinburne, provoked by her quoting of him, occurs during an exchange with Count Dionys, in the context of Dionys' exegesis on the power and violence of the 'red, dark heart':

'...But the acute destruction hasn't begun yet. Wait, wait, till the steeples and tall chimneys all rock on the air like trees in a wind! Ah, *crash!* That is what my soul longs for. And God is with me. God is with me.'

He seemed almost to dance on the grass beside her.

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<sup>10</sup> 'The Ladybird' was written in December 1921 and published in 1923.

<sup>11</sup> In *Women in Love* Ursula and Gudrun are described as having 'the remote, virgin look of modern girls, sisters of Artemis rather than of Hebe' (Lawrence, 1987a, p.8 and n. p.529).

<sup>12</sup> See note to 161:1, Mehl, 1992, p.259.

'I don't think so at all,' she said. 'I think you have just become perverse, nothing more.'

'Wait,' he said, 'wait! Only wait. God is with me.'

'They say the war is going to end. Do you think it is true?'

'Oh yes. Quite sure. This war is enough—it is finished.'

'I wish I were as sure,' she said, sighing.

'Be sure,' he said.

"'We are not sure of sorrow, And joy was never sure'," she quoted. 'Do you know Swinburne? —My husband is coming home. I expect him every day—any day—'

(Lawrence, 1992b, pp.187-88)

The lines quoted here rather self-consciously by Daphne are from 'The Garden of Proserpine', II. 73-4. It is interesting that Lawrence had quoted the same lines, with analogous ostentation, in a letter to Martin Secker of 9 April 1920:<sup>13</sup>

I have done more than half of my new novel [*The Lost Girl*] - think it is amusing, and might be quite popular. Hope to have it done before end of May. - What about it? Do you want to saddle yourself with it, having already the other two books, or shall I go to a commercial firm? Can you tell me of a typist who won't charge me the eyes out of my head to type it for me. - I am a bit scared of putting the sole MS. into this Italian post.

We are not sure of sorrow

And joy was never sure -

(Lawrence, 1984, pp.503-4)

On 31 March, too, (only nine days earlier), Lawrence had quoted from the same poem in a letter to John Ellingham Brooks, describing the odd feeling of familiarity he experienced on arrival at Taormina. The letter proceeds:

You remember Stopford said Sicily had been waiting for me for about 2000 years: must be the sense of that long wait. Not that Sicily waited for me alone

She waits for each and other

She waits for all men born...

(Lawrence, 1984, p.497)

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<sup>13</sup> See note to 188:13: Mehl, 1992, p.265.



Again the lines derive from 'The Garden of Proserpine' - this time II. 57-8 - and again the quoting is ostentatious, as in the majority of cases I have considered. Swinburne - to a greater extent than Keats or Shelley - seems to have sprung to Lawrence's mind in the course of his letter-writing particularly in 1920. The early Romantics had been (consciously) dismissed in the 1919 essay 'Poetry of the Present' as 'finished' and 'gem-like'; and although this essay locates Whitman as the great pioneer of poetry of the present, Swinburne (who remains unmentioned in the essay) is strikingly prominent in the 1920-1 period.

As well as in the correspondence, Lawrence quotes Swinburne in the essay 'The Proper Study', written in December 1923. In this essay Swinburne is cited without quotation marks, and employed rhetorically/metaphorically:

If no man lives for ever, neither does any precept. And if even  
the weariest river winds somewhere to sea, so also does the weariest  
wisdom. (Lawrence, 1988b, p.169)

In 'The Garden of Proserpine' the gods are thanked 'That no life lives for ever; / That dead men rise up never; / That even the weariest river / Winds somewhere safe to sea' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.301). Here Lawrence takes two Swinburnian assertions as starting-points, and formulates his own observation in response. It is interesting (and perhaps ironic, given Lawrence's previous association of Swinburne with 'lurid' literature and the 'perverse spirit') that the essay in which Swinburne is quoted contains the assertion: 'But the literature of perversity is a brief weed' (Lawrence, 1988b, p. 172). In 1921 Lawrence implies that 'lurid' literature must necessarily be included in his *Biblioteca Mundi* as a result of its popular appeal; while in the 1923 essay he emphasises its transience. Whatever inconsistency/change of attitude is evident, however, one thing seems to emerge: that Swinburne often invites association with perversity. In the dialogue I have quoted between Daphne and Dionys in 'The Ladybird', Dionys is revelling in an imagined 'crash' of 'acute

destruction', which provokes the response: 'I think you have just become perverse, nothing more'. In a very different passage, taken from the essay 'The Reality of Peace', included with 'The Proper Study' in the *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine* collection, an implied mythological allusion to Swinburne occurs in the context of the transcendentalisation of violence. In this passage Lawrence is describing two roads which may be taken as alternatives to the 'no-road': 'There is hot sunshine leaping down and interpenetrating the earth to blossom. And there is red fire rushing upward on its path to return, in the coming asunder' (Lawrence, 1988b, p.47). The chosen path is evoked in this passage:

I tread the subtle way of edged hostility, bursting through the glamorous pageant of blood for the undying glory of one gentle Iseult, some delicate dame, some lily unblemished watered by blood. Or I bring forth an exquisite unknown rose from the tree of my veins, a rose of the living spirit, beyond any woman and beyond any man transcendent. (Lawrence, 1988b, pp.46-7)

Lawrence uses the spelling 'Iseult' rather than 'Isolde'. He was familiar with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, but alludes instead to the Iseult of Swinburne (and also Morris) in his long poem 'Tristram of Lyonesse' (1882). It may have been the juxtaposition of glamour and violence; the revelling in destruction; the incongruous 'lily unblemished watered by blood' that made Swinburne's heroine seem appropriate for inclusion at this point. In this vein, it may seem significant that Swinburne is particularly prevalent in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* - in Lawrence's last novel as in his first - as this novel has been notoriously associated with perversity and obscenity, and constitutes an attempt by its author to undermine preconceptions regarding the implications of these terms.



**Lady Chatterley's intertexts.**

The Swinburne allusions/citations in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (written in 1928) are best seen in the context of the many other poetic intertexts also cited in this novel. The references to Keats and Whitman in particular are of interest. At one point Keats is employed in Connie's evocation of the wood outside Mellors' cottage:

The hut was locked. But she sat on the log doorstep, under the rustic porch, and snuggled into her own warmth. So she sat looking at the rain, listening to the many noiseless noises of it, and to the strange soughings of wind in upper branches, when there seemed no wind.

(Lawrence, 1993b, p.93)

The editor notes that 'noiseless noises' relates to Keats' poem 'I stood Tip-Toe' (1817), l.11.<sup>14</sup> If this interpretation of derivation is accepted, it seems that Connie's act of perception filters through the previously assimilated phrase, fleetingly inhabiting a prior act of attention. It might be said that in another instance Keats is woven into the Lawrence-text in a way that reflects Connie's mind and perception. Mrs Bolton has been sent to find Connie, who has been out in the wood during a storm, and is perceived as follows: 'And so Connie had come upon her in the drive, alone and palely loitering' (Lawrence, 1993b, p.230). The phrase, deriving from Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', is employed here with deep irony, created by the incongruity of the portrayal and the ludicrous position in which Mrs Bolton has been situated in her role as Clifford's minion-spy. This use of Keats seems forced, and contrasts with the surfacing of 'noiseless noises' in an evocation of natural beauty.

Interestingly, however, it is Clifford who employs Keats most overtly, in a very different 'nature' scene from the one in which Connie sits on the doorstep of Mellors' hut. Here Connie is not solitary but accompanied by

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<sup>14</sup> See note to 93:39, Squires, 1993, p.350. Keats' line reads 'A little noiseless noise among the leaves' (Keats, 1988, p.76).

Clifford, and it is the latter who quotes Keats - rather stiffly and self-consciously:

The chair puffed on. In the hazel copse catkins were hanging pale gold, and in sunny places the wood-anemones were wide open as if exclaiming with the joy of life, just as good as in past days, when people could exclaim along with them. They had a faint scent of apple-blossom. Connie gathered a few for Clifford.

He took them and looked at them curiously.

““Thou still unravished bride of quietness,”” he quoted.— ‘It seems to fit flowers so much better than Greek vases.’

‘Ravished is such a horrid word!’ she said. ‘It’s only people who ravish things.’

‘Oh I don’t know - snails and things,’ he said.

‘Even snails only eat them. And bees don’t ravish.’

She was angry with him, turning everything into words. Violets were Juno’s eyelids and windflowers were unravished brides. How she hated words, always coming between her and life! They did the ravishing, if anything did: ready-made words and phrases sucking all the life-sap out of living things. (Lawrence, 1993b, p.93)

There is no intertextual puzzle here, rather a blatant, undisguised quotation from Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ to which Connie responds with disgust. She associates the line (and in particular the term ‘unravished’) with the words that are persistently ‘coming between her and life’, ‘sucking all the life-sap out of living things’. Her sense of the paucity of words, the debased nature of utterance, is similar to that expressed in the ‘More Pansies’ poems ‘[Thomas Earp]’, ‘[Mr Squire]’ and the ‘God is Born!’ sequence; whose continuity is attributable (as I have argued in Chapter 1) to their preoccupation with debased utterance. In the passage above, as in these poems, the wonders of nature are shown to be debased by the maudlin attribution to them of human characteristics. In the poems, the appropriate response to the multiple manifestations of the birth of G/god is awed silence. So Keats is here associated with Clifford’s pompous verbalising, placed in antithesis to Connie’s rather angry, idealising and romantic sensibility.



In a strikingly similar scene, in which Clifford is puffing through the wood in his chair with Connie by his side, other intertexts are brought into play, namely Robert Bridges and Walt Whitman:

And the chair began to advance slowly, joltingly down the beautiful broad riding washed over with blue encroaching hyacinths. Oh last of all ships, through the hyacinthine shallows! oh pinnacle on the last wild waters, sailing in the last voyage of our civilisation! Whither, oh weird wheeled ship, your slow course steering—!! Quiet and complacent, Clifford sat at the wheel of adventure: in his old black hat and tweed jacket, motionless and cautious. Oh captain, my Captain, our splendid trip is done! Not yet though! Downhill, in the wake, came Constance in her grey dress, watching the chair jolt downwards. (Lawrence, 1993b, p.185)

Here Connie is not in the perceptual driving seat: the stringently ironic portrayal of Clifford is achieved through the intertextually laced rhetoric of the narrative voice. Two specific intertexts are employed parodically here: Bridges' 'A Passer-By' and Whitman's 'O Captain! My Captain! Both are changed when quoted, and do not appear in quotation marks. The former is altered from 'Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding.../ Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?' to 'Whither, oh weird wheeled ship, your slow course steering—!!'; while the second alludes to the title of Whitman's poem 'O Captain! My Captain!' and to the line 'O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done' (Whitman, 1973, p.337).<sup>15</sup> Clifford's illusory self-importance is emphasised and undermined in the context of the mock-heroic depiction of him, as he sits 'at the wheel of adventure'. He is quiet and complacent, yet also motionless and cautious. His danger is real yet it is simultaneously rather absurd: he sails the 'last wild waters', yet is actually floundering in the 'hyacinthine shallows'. Clifford's 'voyage' is therefore deflated through the interpolation of the intertexts, yet the intertexts do not remain unscathed. In this new context they brush against images which stick to them like burrs. They

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<sup>15</sup> See notes to 185:7 and 185:10, Squires, 1993, p.357.

become intertextually enriched/contaminated; made mock-heroic through association with the laborious passage of a mock-hero.

Predominantly, Keats, Whitman and Bridges are employed as parodic intertexts, associated with the rather pompous verbosity of Clifford as he adapts a mock-heroic stance in the puffing chair. By contrast, Swinburne is always associated either with Connie alone or with Connie and Mellors, and used to describe/evoke beauty rather than to deflate the spoiler of beauty. While (for instance) Keats is used for Mrs Bolton 'palely loitering', Swinburnian pallor is adopted in the evocation of a mythologically resonant wood:

The first windflowers were out, and even the wood seemed pale with the pallor of endless little anemones sprinkling the shaken floor. 'The world has grown pale with thy breath.' But it was the breath of Persephone, this time. She was out of hell, on a cold morning.

(Lawrence, 1993b, pp.85-86)

The quotation is from Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine', I.35: 'Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.202).<sup>16</sup> Another pallor is borrowed directly from Swinburne, this time associated with the physical beauty of Mellors, in which he is likened to a flower:

And the Keeper—his thin white body like a lonely pistil of an invisible flower! She had forgotten him, in her unspeakable depression. But now something roused. 'Pale beyond porch and portal'—the thing to do was to pass the porches and the portals.

(Lawrence, 1993b, p.85)

This time the quotation is interpreted, the implication being that it is necessary to pass the porches and portals of an ancestral home such as Wragby, in order to find the liberation through touch associated both with Mellors and with the

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<sup>16</sup> See note to 85:34, Squires, 1993, p.349.



wood he inhabits. The quotation is, unsurprisingly, from 'The Garden of Proserpine': the text which Lawrence refers to and quotes from copiously in his correspondence.<sup>17</sup>

In a final instance, Swinburne's poetry describes Connie in her awareness of her 'self' as amalgam of herself, Mellors and their child. The language employed here is rhapsodic and incantatory in the repetition of the word 'beautiful', for example, and the phrase 'him and his child, him and his child':

She was gone in her own soft rapture, like a forest soughing  
with the dim, glad moan of spring, moving into bud. She could feel in  
the same world with her the man, the nameless man, moving on  
beautiful feet, beautiful in the phallic mystery. And in herself, in all  
her veins, she felt him and his child, him and his child. His child was  
in all her veins, like a twilight.

'For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor feet, nor golden  
Treasures of hair—'

She was like a forest, like the dark interlacing of the oakwood,  
humming inaudibly with myriad unfolding buds. Meanwhile the birds  
of desire were asleep in the vast interlaced intricacy of her body.

(Lawrence, 1993b, p.138)

Lawrence slips easily here into a disembodied, non-actual language, like that of the Swinburne quoted. This language seems typical of Lawrence's style in his last five years: it is, for example, that of *The Escaped Cock* when Lawrence uses the following image to describe a pregnant woman: 'Thou art like a tree whose green leaves follow the blossoms, full of sap' (Lawrence, 1973, p.59). The feeling of 'twilight' (a significant word in the late poems) in Connie's veins is in part illuminated by Swinburne's lines, which reveal the forest-state to be both non-human and transcendental: beyond mortal beauty. Connie, who becomes like 'oakwood', by implication possesses the 'life-sap' that she feels is

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<sup>17</sup> See note to 85:18, Squires, 1993, p.349.

removed from life by Clifford's verbalising, epitomised in his quoting of Keats. The quotation this time is from 'The Pilgrims', II. 6-7, *Songs Before Sunrise*,<sup>18</sup> which Lawrence does not apparently mention specifically elsewhere, indicating the concealed range of his reading of this favourite author. The way in which Swinburne, by contrast with Keats and Whitman, is associated with Connie in 'touch' with Mellors and in her anthropological relation with nature, suggests that Lawrence identified a degree of insight in Swinburne that belies his earlier articulated reservations. He may once have referred to Swinburne as 'shallow'; but in 1928 Swinburne was still a natural resource for creating the sense of a rapture, a loss of conscious awareness: and Lawrence's own prose takes on Swinburnian textures around the actual quotation.

**Last Poems: *Swinburnian Gods and elements*.**

In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, published in 1928, Lawrence reveals an unequivocal debt to Swinburne: a debt evident in the traces that can be followed very simply to a source. The poems written during the two subsequent years have no such explicit references, allusions or citations: the intertextuality is less overt, and demands more readerly exertion, as well as an awareness of readerly limitation. It is possible to identify some specific terminological correlations, in which (for example) an unusual or unusually applied term occurs in Swinburne and is adopted by Lawrence for use in a new context. For instance, Swinburne uses the term 'leavings' in several poems in order to describe a residual trace left by a departed person, substance or essence. In 'Anactoria' he refers to the 'leavings of the lilies in thine hair' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.191); in 'A Ballad of Burdens' to the 'sick leavings of the sterile sea' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.256); in 'Hymn to Proserpine' to the 'lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of racks and rods!' (Swinburne, 1925a); and in *Tristram of Lyonesse* to 'Featureless heads discrowned of hate

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<sup>18</sup> See note to 138:21, Squires, 1993, p 353.



and love, / Mockeries and masks of motion and mute breath, / Leavings of life, the superflux of death-' (Swinburne, 1925c, p.30). The last quotation bears significant resemblance to the following lines from Lawrence's poem 'Shadows':

And if, in the changing phases of man's life  
I fall in sickness and in misery  
my wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead  
and strength is gone, and my life  
is only the leavings of a life...  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.727)

The 'leavings of life' in Swinburne - residue of mockeries and masks of 'motion and mute breath' - have become the 'leavings of a life': residue of another mockery of life, namely sickness.

The term 'leavings', then, is itself left as residue in Lawrence's late poetry as a trace or signpost, which enables the reader to identify a link: even if the linking does not necessary prove that the term has been appropriated from that particular source. Often, Swinburne is not even signposted as clearly as this in the texts, but his poetry (like that of Keats, Shelley, Whitman and numerous others) provides one of the contexts in which Lawrence's late poems can be located and analysed. As with Keats and Shelley the links formulated are tenuous and never presented as definitive, exhaustive or exclusive: they enable and provoke new associations rather than closing off alternative possibilities.

I have previously suggested that Lawrence responded to the mythological aspect of Swinburne's poems, using (for instance) Swinburne's *Atlanta* in his portrayal of characters such as Lettie and Daphne, and in his letters, essays and short fiction. It seems evident, for example, that Lawrence's *Aphrodite of the foam*<sup>19</sup> derives in part from Swinburne's *Aphrodite* as

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<sup>19</sup> See note to 159:14 in *The First 'Women in Love'* (Lawrence, 1999): 'In the Hesiodic account of her birth, Aphrodite (Venus) is represented as having sprung from the foam (*aphros*) which gathered round the mutilated genitals of Uranus; see notes on 227:25 and 291:24. See also *Letters* iii. 39 and n.3; *Study of Thomas Hardy* 69: 22-4; *Twilight in Italy*, ed. Eggert 116: 25-30; 'The Crown', *Reflections*, ed. Herbert 292:16'.

portrayed in numerous poems. In *Atlanta in Calydon* Aphrodite is 'A flower of the foam of the seas' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.295); while in 'Laus Veneris' Swinburne describes Aphrodite's emergence from the sea as follows:

As when she came out of the naked sea  
Making the foam as fire whereon she trod,  
And as the inner flower of fire was she.  
(Swinburne, 1925a, p.160)

In 'Hymn to Proserpine' (often quoted by Lawrence) Aphrodite is 'a blossom of flowering seas, / Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment, and fair as the foam,' who 'Came flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial, her foot on the sea' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.204). Lawrence's poem 'The Man of Tyre' (in 'More Pansies') describes the emergence of a woman whose appearance provokes the inevitable Aphrodite association. She is described as 'lovely, lovely' as she goes deeper, then shallower, and is illuminated and beatified by the backdrop-sky, in the way that Swinburne's goddess comes 'flushed from the full-flushed wave': 'the shoulders pallid with light from the silent sky behind / both breasts dim and mysterious, with the glamorous kindness of twilight between them' (Lawrence, MS2, p.5; 1993a, p.693). The narrator of Lawrence's poem identifies the woman as the mythological, Swinburnian Aphrodite, emerging naked from the 'naked sea':

So in the cane-brake he clasped his hands in delight  
that could only be god-given, and murmured:  
Lo! God is one god! But here in the twilight  
godly and lovely comes Aphrodite out of the sea  
towards me!

(Lawrence, MS2, p.5; 1993a, p.693)

A notable difference between the evocations is that Swinburne's Aphrodite is associated with the flush arising from fire; while Lawrence's figure is dimly lit, emerging in the twilight. In 'Hymn to Proserpine' the sea is a turbulent and potent force, associated with the power and restlessness also conveyed by



Lawrence in the poem 'Whales Weep Not!' (a poem that evokes the heat and vitalism of the sea evident in Swinburne's description of a 'refluent seaweed' that 'stretches and swings to the slow passionate pulse of the sea' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.304).

As well as the mythological intertextuality discussed above, a correlation of imagery and association may be adduced, for which elemental images of sea and fire provide exemplification. Significantly, in the 'Dana' essay of *Studies of Classic American Literature*, Lawrence explicitly refers to Swinburne as a poet who has attempted to appropriate and idealise the sea in his writing:

The further extreme, the greatest mother, is the sea. Love the great mother of the sea, the Magna Mater. And see how bitter it is. And see how you must fail to win her to your ideal: forever fail. Absolutely fail.

Swinburne tried in England. But the Americans made the greatest trial. (Lawrence, 1971a, p.120)

In the following lines from 'Hymn to Proserpine', which possess the rhythmic drive for which Swinburne is renowned, foam and tides are associated with 'deep death':

All delicate days and pleasant, all spirits and sorrows are cast  
Far out with the foam of the present that sweeps to the surf of the past:  
Where beyond the extreme sea-wall, and between the remote sea-gates,  
Waste water washes, and tall ships founder, and deep death waits:  
Where, mighty with deepening sides, clad about with the seas as with wings,  
And impelled of invisible tides, and fulfilled of unspeakable things,  
White-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and serpentine-curved,  
Rolls, under the whitening wind of the future, the wave of the world.

(Swinburne, 1925a, pp.202-3)

In Lawrence's 'Ship of Death' draft the unspeakable dangers lurking beneath the ocean are described, yet they are given metaphorical charge, and associated with the agonies and shortcomings of life:

past the jutting rocks of shadow,  
 past the lurking, octopus arms of agonised memory  
 past the strange whirlpools of remembered greed,  
 through the dead weed of a lifetime's falsity...

(Lawrence, MS1, p.68; 1993a, p.963)

While Lawrence's poem is concerned ultimately with the rebirth resulting from the 'deep death' described (fully developed in the 'Last Poems' 'The Ship of Death'), Swinburne's is concerned with the awesome unconquerability of the 'insuperable sea'. He asks: 'Will ye bridle the deep sea with reins, will ye chasten the high sea with rods? / Will ye take her to chain her with chains, who is older than all ye Gods?' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.203). The sea is destructive; it is also possessed of an animism that is revealed in 'Anactoria' through personification: Swinburne refers here to the 'flamelike foam of the sea's closing lips-' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.194). In Lawrence, too, the sea is both sentient and capable of acting irrationally and whimsily: 'Let me tell you that the sun is alive, and can be angry, and the sea is alive, and can sulk' (Lawrence, MS1, p.18; 1993a, p.625).

'Anactoria' reveals another aspect of the Swinburnian sea, the antithesis of the destructive powers emphasised in 'Hymn to Proserpine'. The sea can be a welcome retreat: it is a 'deep dear sea' with a coverlet of 'cool wan foam' and 'great sweet waves'. In the poem 'The Triumph of Time' this aspect of the sea - the sea that can comfort rather than burn - is emphasised. Swinburne refers to 'a wave of the sea turned back by song' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.180), and associates the sea with maternal solicitude:

I will go back to the great sweet mother,  
     Mother and lover of men, the sea.  
 I will go down to her, I and none other,  
     Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me;  
 Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast:  
 O fair white mother, in days long past  
 Born without sister, born without brother,  
     Set free my soul as thy soul is free.  
     (Swinburne, 1925a, p.177)



Analagously, in *Atlanta in Calydon*, Meleager when dying articulates a desire to be 'What the flower of the foam is / In fields of the sea, / That the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the gulf-stream a garment for me' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.345). In his poem 'Mana of the Sea' Lawrence pushes to further extremes the desire to 'Close with', 'Cling to', 'hold...fast' the sea, or the wish to adopt it as a 'garment', describing an identification that culminates in imagined metamorphosis:

Have I caught from it  
the tide in my arms  
that runs down to the shallows of my wrists, and breaks  
abroad in my hands, like waves among the rocks of substance?

Do the rollers of the sea  
roll down my thighs  
and over the submerged islets of my knees  
with power, sea-power  
sea-power  
to break against the ground  
in the flat, recurrent breakers of my two feet?

And is my body ocean, ocean  
whose power runs to the shores along my arms  
and breaks in the foamy hands, whose power rolls out  
to the white-treading waves of two salt feet?

I am the sea, I am the sea!  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.15; 1993a, p.705)

Lawrence's juxtaposition of the described 'rollers' which 'roll down my thighs' with the reiterated term 'sea-power' might imply a force that is related to the power of sexuality: the kind of dark potency which Ursula discovers in Birkin's thighs in the 1917-19 *Women in Love*. However, this poem describes a transformation, a metamorphosis, in which such power is assimilated, rather than using it as an emblem or metaphor for love or passion. For Swinburne, by contrast, sea-power is a perfect emblem for sexuality that can be powerful, delicious and even sadistic. In 'The Triumph of Time' the sea (in spite of being

a 'green girdled mother of mine') is described in such terms: 'Thy sweet hard kisses are strong like wine, / Thy large embraces are keen like pain'. In the following stanza the sexuality is more explicit:

I shall sleep and move with the moving ships,  
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;  
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips,  
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;  
(Swinburne, 1925a, p.177)

The sea here is a fiery element: hot with sexuality as in 'Whales Weep Not!', and powerful, as in 'Mana of the Sea'. A huntsman in *Atlanta in Calydon*, describing Aurora, refers to 'the long sea fiery from thy feet' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.269). (The fire/water dichotomy is one which I will discuss in the following chapter in relation to Lawrence's reading of the pre-Socratics.)

### ***Borrowed titles.***

At the beginning of this chapter I quoted Lawrence's reference to Swinburne as a fiery spirit: a title borrowed from Shelley's description of Napoleon. The term 'fiery' is, in fact, also employed by Swinburne in his famous description of Victor Hugo. This precursor possesses 'purer power with fiery breath', and provokes 'fiery sound and tears'. It is also characteristic of Swinburnian description: notably in *Atlanta in Calydon*, in which the hunted boar 'mars with tooth and tusk and fiery feet' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.275), and 'Light sharper than the frequent flames of day / That daily fill it from the fiery dawn; / Gleams, (Swinburne, 1925e, p.309). In 'Anactoria' Swinburne describes 'clamorous vales' in which may be heard 'Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.198): suggesting that Lawrence's portrayal of the unsad nightingale in his essay may have been following the same subverting tradition



as Swinburne, in his sense of their fieryness.<sup>20</sup> When Lawrence referred to Swinburne as a 'fiery' spirit he was characterising his precursor by employing one of his own terms.

The same might be argued of the 'rushing flame of life' attributed to Swinburne by Lawrence in correspondence. In Swinburne's 'Hendecasyllabics', 'Flame as fierce as the fervid eyes of lions' half divides the 'eyelids of the sunset' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.331). In *Atlanta in Calydon* 'the faint fresh flame of the young year flushes' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.272); Althaea's speech 'flickers like a blown-out flame' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.273); an eagle 'flames and beats broad wings against the sun' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.284); Love is 'swift and subtle and blind as a flame of fire' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.294); and God's eyelids are 'flames of fire' (Swinburne, 1925e, p.308). Flame is also associated with physicality and in particular with passion: in *Atlanta in Calydon* Althaea's brows and lips 'Tremble and sob in sleeping, like swift flames' (Swinburne, 1925c, p. 277); in 'Laus Veneris' a state is described in which 'all the fighting face is grown aflame / For pleasure' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.154); while in 'Les Noyades' the narrator 'Caught fire, waxed bright as a great bright flame' when the girl 'winced and whitened' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.182). Flames of passion are conspicuous (unsurprisingly) in *Tristram of Lyonesse*, in which (for example) 'the bright night's breath of flame / Shot fire into their kisses'; (Swinburne, 1925b, p.68) and 'dawn rose too within [Tristram] as a flame' (Swinburne, 1925b, p.79). The latter contains a reference also to 'soft live

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<sup>20</sup> I have mentioned Lawrence's line 'singing darker than the nightingale' in 'Shadows', harking back to Keats; it is necessary to counter this with the lines from 'Lord's Prayer':

Like the kingdom of the nightingale at twilight  
whose power and glory I have often heard and felt.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.14; 1993a, p. 704).

See also:

And all that hour unheard the nightingales  
Clamoured, and all the woodland soul was stirred,  
(Swinburne, 1925c, p.71)

gleams' penetrating darkness (Swinburne, 1925b, p.71); while in 'The Triumph of Time' 'The bright fine lips so cruelly curled' 'gleam in a dream' (Swinburne, 1925a, p.174).

I have previously identified Shelley as poet of the 'gleam'. Yet the fiery Swinburne must also be behind the gleam associated by Lawrence with godliness in 'More Pansies':

Some men look straight into the eyes of the gods  
and some men can see no gods, they only know  
the gods are there because of the gleam on the faces of the men who see.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.36; 1993a, p.649)

Lawrence identifies an inner gleam or flame that can exist or rise in a human, as it does in Tristram. Only the minority of modern men possess this, and they are 'lit up' by the 'flame / of life undimmed' (Lawrence, MS1, p.35; 1993a, p.648) from which real delight is derived.

In the poem 'Lucifer', drafted by Lawrence both in 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems', Satan is said to possess the inner gleam that differentiates him both from mechanised modern man, and from the conventionalised hierarchies of heaven:

In the dark-blue depths, under layers and layers of darkness,  
I see him more like the ruby, a gleam from within  
of his own magnificence,  
coming like the ruby in the invisible dark, glowing  
with his own annunciation, towards us.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.697)

The two 'Lucifer' poems (or both drafts of the same poem) may be said to have a borrowed title, derived from Swinburne's poem 'Lucifer', which is, in fact, about one of his significant precursors, Voltaire.<sup>21</sup> In this poem Voltaire is

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<sup>21</sup> It is arguable, conversely, that Lawrence's reference to 'Lucifer' is not a direct allusion to Swinburne, but that both (late Romantic) poets are using the Shelleyan/Blakean praise of Satan as the real hero of *Paradise Lost* as a way of rather wickedly subverting orthodoxy, and asserting heroics.



characterised as a 'godlike lover of sunlike truth', and singled out as the one person whom, 'Of all souls born to strive before the sun', loves good and hates evil most. In this poem Swinburne is responding to a quotation from another hero - Victor Hugo - who said of Voltaire 'Les Prêtres ont raison de l'appeler Lucifer' (Swinburne, 1925d, p.303). Swinburne overturns this description, however, by casting Voltaire in the role of Christ and identifying him as a liberating saviour:

The snake that felt thy heel upon her head,  
Night's first-born, writhes as though she were not dead,  
But strikes not, stings not, slays not as before.  
(Swinburne, 1925d, p.303)

Voltaire, as lover of good and loather of evil, has removed some of the sting from cloying orthodoxy.

Lawrence, in his 'Lucifer' poems, also challenges conventionality, subverts orthodoxy. He does so with an ostensibly intertextual allusion to *Macbeth*, in the lines: 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell', proceeding to argue that Satan lost none of his brightness in falling. The reference to Shakespeare is overt: yet in the poem-title, the desire to subvert orthodoxy and the 'gleam from within' it becomes possible to infer that this poem is also in intertextual dialogue with a fiery spirit other than the fallen angel which the poem vividly describes. The dialogue is not one that can be clearly charted: it can only be glimpsed in the leavings of brief words, titles and symbols, identified and perceived belatedly as borrowings.

### *Lawrence and Whitman: Essays on art-speech; demons and dualisms.*

Walt Whitman was probably the most significant precursor underlying Lawrence's poetry writing throughout his life. While Swinburne was placed alongside Shelley as 'our greatest poet' in 1916, so, in 1919 (in the first draft of

his 'Whitman' essay), Lawrence afforded Whitman, alongside Dante and Shakespeare, this supreme position. Whitman was roughly contemporaneous with Swinburne (and thus a current literary figure for Lawrence), as is emphasised by the mutual awareness and recognition implied in particular by Swinburne's writing. Swinburne clearly possessed a deep-rooted familiarity with Whitman's work, as is evident in his poem entitled 'To Walt Whitman in America'. A profound intertextual engagement is more strongly indicated by Swinburne's recourse to Whitmanesque words and imagined behaviour in response to a significant political event:

We recall Swinburne's euphoric response to the declaration of the Third Republic on September 4: 'I feel inclined to go out and kiss everybody I meet—to roll on the ground and "come naked in contact with the earth" as Whitman says somewhere ...'

(Harrison, 1990, p.192)

This seems to be a misremembering of 'Song of Myself' lines 19-20: 'I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, / I am mad for it to be in contact with me' (Whitman, 1973, p.29).<sup>22</sup> Swinburne and Whitman, although inhabiting different countries, were intertextually linked during their lifetimes: lifetimes which happened to coincide with the birth and growth of Lawrence, who would form another link in the intertextual chain.

Whitman's continuing significance for Lawrence is most clearly indicated by the three surviving 'Whitman' essays (written between 1919 and 1923), the essay 'Poetry of the Present' (1919) and the free-verse form of Lawrence's later poems including one entitled 'Retort to Whitman' (in 'More Pansies'). Whitman's influence on Lawrence's *Last Poems*, characterised by a 'dual motion' of adulation and antagonism, is best considered in the context of the three versions of the essay in which Lawrence's shifting responses to his precursor are given expression.

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<sup>22</sup> C.f. Birkin's naked contact with the vegetation in 'Breadalby' (Lawrence, 1987a, pp.106-7).



It is necessary to consider the genesis of Lawrence's 'Whitman' essay in relation to the composition of the other essays eventually included in his *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). On 9 January 1917 Lawrence wrote to his agent Pinker: 'I have got in my head a set of essays, or lectures, on Classic American literature' (Lawrence, 1984, p.73). The first versions of these essays (to be revised extensively at a later date) were composed in 1917 and 1918: in June 1918 Lawrence told Sally Hopkin that he was 'writing a last essay on Whitman – then I have done my book of American essays' (Lawrence, 1984, p.247). Eight of these initial versions appeared in the *English Review* between November 1918 and June 1919 (but not including the Whitman essay);<sup>23</sup> and the unpublished essays were revised extensively by Lawrence between September and October 1919. (He made only minor alterations to the essays already published.) Further revisions took place in the summer of 1920, and on July 23, 1921, Curtis Brown published a cut version of this second revision of the 'Whitman' essay in *The Nation* and *The Athenaeum*.<sup>24</sup> Then, in America in the winter of 1922-3, Lawrence revised all the essays once more, and - after further changes to the 'Whitman' essay at the proof stage - they were published in August 1923 and June 1924 by Seltzer and Secker respectively.

The radical differences in style, attitude and approach between the different versions highlight the complexity of Lawrence's engagement both with the poetry of Whitman (my principal concern) and (more generally) with what he was imaginatively creating as the 'spirit' of America. The extant early versions of the *Studies* show how Lawrence was developing the kind of 'philosophical' thinking originally formulated in 'Study of Thomas Hardy' (1914) and taken further in 'The Crown' (1915), 'At the Gates' (1916), 'The

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<sup>23</sup> The first draft of the 'Whitman' essay exists in manuscript form (Roberts E382B), and will be available in full for the first time in the impending Cambridge edition of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ed. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen. (I am grateful to the editors for advice about the dates of the various drafts).

<sup>24</sup> This second draft may be found in Lawrence, 1962.

Reality of Peace' (1917) and continued in 'Education of the People' (1918/20), *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922). Lawrence's explicitly subjective engagement with philosophical questions in his American essays - 'I have got it all off my chest. I shall never write another page of philosophy - or whatever it is - when these are done' (Lawrence, 1984, p.224) - reveals something of the eclectic nature of these essays, which range quite freely beyond literary criticism into other areas of Lawrentian preoccupation. I have already argued that it is necessary to avoid considering Lawrence's expressed attitudes as objective evaluations of particular writers and works of literature: for these attitudes are determined by a number of underlying 'hidden agendas' (the Lawrence/Murry correspondence on the subject of Keats serves as a useful paradigm). So, when examining the different versions of the *Studies* it is essential both to explore the relation of the expressed views to Lawrence's contemporaneous writings, and to consider the nature of the audience (as well as Lawrence's attitude towards that audience) for whom the essays were intended.

While the philosophical nature of the initial versions of the essays is generally acknowledged, the embodied concepts are less frequently considered in relation to those expressed in preceding and succeeding fiction. The composition of the *Studies* spans the period between the completion of the novels *Women in Love* (first finished in 1916) and *Kangaroo* (published in 1923). The first version of 'The Spirit of Place' (hereafter SP1) seems directly related to Birkin's progressive 'theory' about love, as expressed in the following passage:

'There is,' he said, in a voice of pure abstraction, 'a final me which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So there is a final you. And it is there I want to meet you - not in the emotional, loving plane - but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement. There we are two stark, unknown beings, two utterly strange creatures, I would want to approach you, and you me - And there could be no obligation, because there is no standard for action there, because no understanding has been reaped from that plane. It is



quite inhuman, - so there can be no calling to book, in any form whatsoever - because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies. One can only follow the impulse, taking that which lies in front, and responsible for nothing, asked for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire.'

Ursula listened to this speech, her mind dumb and almost senseless, that he said was so unexpected and so untoward.

(Lawrence, 1987a, p.146)

SP1 might be seen as an early example of the extreme position adopted here by Birkin, and culminating later in Aaron Sisson's recoil from human contact into a kind of solipsism. Lawrence is not concerned with a realistic portrayal of America: a country which had just forfeited its 'otherness' through declaring war on Germany on 6 April 1917. Rather, Lawrence adopts America as a useful metaphor or symbol for the inhuman otherness so attractive to Birkin:

We have thought and spoken till now in terms of likeness and oneness. Now we must learn to think in terms of difference and otherness. There is a stranger on the face of the earth, and it is no use our trying any further to gull ourselves that he is one of us, and just as we are. There is an unfathomable gulf between us and America, and across the space we see, not our own folk signalling to us, but strangers, incomprehensible beings, simulacra perhaps of ourselves, but *other*, creatures of an other-world. (Lawrence, 1962, p.17)

Here, the American people become strangers embodying the 'untranslatable otherness' which Birkin sees as essential to a relationship that will transcend the 'love' characterised by merging and mingling. The passage is clearly situated within a developing thought process and articulates an idea of the past/future dichotomy: 'Now we must learn to think in terms of difference and otherness...The oneness is historic only'. America, at a suitable remove, is made the emblem for otherness, while its literature enables us to have access to it: 'It is the genuine American literature which affords the best approach to the knowledge of the otherness' (Lawrence, 1962, p.17).

It is arguable that Lawrence's attitude towards American literature is in itself an idealisation, or even a falsification. He associates it with a subterranean

‘undertone’ which is latent in the English language, but which remains unperceived or unacknowledged by the typical Englishman:

We read the English utterance without getting the alien American implication. We listen to our own speech in American mouths, but our ears have been shut to the strange reverberation of that speech. We have not wanted to hear the undertone, the curious foreign, uncouth suggestion, which is in the over-cultured Hawthorne or Whitman.

(Lawrence, 1962, p.16)

Just as America is other, so its literature is alien, and must be acknowledged as strange, insightful and even visionary: it is the failure of lots of the Englishmen and the putative American readers that they can only respond to the superficial layer of familiarity, and ignore the foreign depths. Yet the curious juxtaposition of ‘uncouth’ and ‘over-cultured’ reveals the paradoxical and manipulative nature of Lawrence’s attitude towards American utterance. It is arguable that he is projecting his own sense of a visionary undercurrent on to a mode of expression he acknowledges as self-conscious and somewhat artificial, *making* it a paradigmatic embodiment of the visionary art characterised by alien resonance and subconscious insight.

He attributes to art-utterance a duplicity in which the artist’s ostensible moral purpose is undercut, constantly subverted, by his artistic deeper self:

Only art-utterance reveals the whole truth of a people. And the American art-speech reveals what the American plain speech almost deliberately conceals. What Hawthorne deliberately says in *The Scarlet Letter* is on the whole a falsification of what he unconsciously says in his art-language. And this, again, is one of the outstanding qualities of American literature: that the deliberate ideas of the man veil, conceal, obscure that which the artist has to reveal. This quality of duplicity which runs through so much of the art of the modern world is almost inevitable in an American book. The author is unconscious of it himself. He is sincere in his own intention. And yet, all the time, the artist, who writes as a somnambulist, in the spell of pure truth as in a dream, is contravened and contradicted by the wakeful man and moralist who sits at the desk.

(Lawrence, 1962, pp.17-18)



This passage seems to relate only tangentially to the specific consideration of *American* literature. Here Lawrence is exploring and expanding his theories regarding the duplicitous nature of artistic composition, in which (in a later, famous formulation) the 'young man' and the 'demon' are at odds. The 'somnambulist' (later the 'demon') 'is contravened and contradicted by' (finds a hand clamped over his mouth by) the 'wakeful man and moralist' (the 'young man') who must veil and repress what the artist has to reveal. Lawrence formulates this demon/young man dichotomy in his 'Preface' to *Collected Poems* (written in 1928), in which he employs a new language in order to give a retrospective account of his own way of writing and revising poetry. It is important to recognise the limitations of such a retrospective account: Lawrence is imposing a newly formulated language and fresh categories on his youthful writings, so that his evaluation is an interpretation rather than an objective account of his previous poetic voice. It is also important to recognise that the terms 'somnambulist' and 'demon' have very different resonances and implications: the former suggests a passive, receptive state in which the artist is (in Wordsworth's terms) laid asleep in body, becoming a living soul; while the latter implies a dynamic, active force. However, both formulations proceed from a belief in the duality inherent in art-speech and artists, and his engagement with American literature provided Lawrence with a useful opportunity for articulating and expanding his own ideas regarding artistic composition at that stage in his thinking.

Arguably, Lawrence's 'dual' response to American literature may be attributed in part to the duality he senses within it: he may (simultaneously) respond positively to the 'undertone' produced by the 'somnambulist', and negatively to the over-cultured, superficial language he feels to be imposed by the desk-bound 'moralist'. The radical shifts between and even within versions of the essays are generally attributable to a difference in emphasis rather than in response: a predominantly positive first or second version can become negative simply by the redistribution of its contingent elements.

*Three essays in conflict: Whitman as seer and swindle.*

The three versions of the 'Whitman' essay more than any testify to the radical shifts in tone, attitude and response which I have identified throughout *Studies*. The first surviving 1919 draft is almost unstinted in its enthusiasm and adulation;<sup>25</sup> the second of 1920 is still enthusiastic but at times qualified in its praise; the third of 1922-3 is mainly denigratory. However, the distinction between the versions of the 'Whitman' essay cannot adequately be summarised by applying the terms 'positive' and 'negative'. Neither can the second essay (for instance) be considered as unequivocally and entirely coherent in its expressed attitude, as (for example) Armin Arnold suggests. Rather, this essay is in its own way split by the desire to acknowledge the inspirational, visionary quality of the poet Lawrence admired above all others; and the need to articulate an objection to the aspects of Whitman's 'philosophy' that are at odds with Lawrence's own. The celebratory tone may be predominant in this second version but the objections cannot be ignored: particularly as they were to form the basis of Lawrence's attack on Whitman in the 1923 version of the essay.

In the second 'Whitman' essay, Lawrence acknowledges the significance of the objections to Whitman already expressed (cursorily) in the first version, by referring to the 'quarrel' which he must 'get over' before he can proceed to the unsurpassable greatness of his precursor as poet and 'seer'. The 'quarrel' relates to concepts explored both in Lawrence's philosophical writing and in his fiction: notably in *Women in Love*. Whitman 'affects himself': his 'passional', spontaneous self (represented by the lower centres in Lawrence's mapping of the body and its nerve centres, and by the demon or somnambulist in his writings on poetry) is made subject to the cerebral and

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<sup>25</sup> Exceptions include: 'This is what makes Whitman...so monstrous, a shattering half-truth...' (Lawrence, MS3, p.10) and 'It is no wonder men complain of the humbug' (Lawrence, MS3, p.11).



'conscious' upper centres, so that the will regulates, controls and represses the deeper impulses. To employ the language of *Fantasia of the Unconscious*: 'the peculiar will of the upper centre - the sort of nervous, critical objectivity, the deliberate forcing of sympathy, the play upon pity and tenderness, the plaintive bullying of love, or the benevolent bullying of love - these we don't care to recognise. They are the extravagance of spiritual will' (Lawrence, 1933, p.35). Hermione is perhaps the purest exemplar of the kind of animal-like spontaneity which has become entirely mentalised, causing Birkin to recoil in revulsion from her.<sup>26</sup> In SP1 Lawrence refers to the typically American way of provoking mental reactions to the physical self, so that everything becomes self-conscious and spurious, without spontaneity (see Lawrence, 1962, p.27).

Yet even this mentalising of the physical self presupposes both a preoccupation with and a knowledge of this physical self. Whitman, according to Lawrence, had gone forward in life-knowledge through his understanding of the inseparability of body and soul, and his consequent emphasis on the beauty of physicality. In the first and second surviving versions of the essay Lawrence asserts that Whitman penetrated to the quick of life, and even to infinity, achieving the state of 'extensive consciousness' sought by the seers. In the first version Lawrence refers specifically to the language and verse-form through which Whitman is able to go further in actual expression than any other man: 'At his best Whitman gives these throbs naked and vibrating as they emerge from the quick. They follow pulse after pulse, line after line' (Lawrence, MS3, p.19). It was through adopting Whitman's mode of expression - his free-verse form - that Lawrence felt he had himself become liberated, writing 'poetry of the present' that embodied a life-force 'surging itself into utterance at its very well-head' (Lawrence, 1936, p.220).

However, it is on consideration of the nature of Whitmanesque expression that a paradox I mentioned earlier again becomes apparent. It is

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<sup>26</sup> The culmination of this occurs in 'Breadalby', when Hermione strikes Birkin over the head with a paperweight, driving him out to the hills (see Lawrence, 1987a, pp.104-9).

paradoxical that Lawrence can assert that Whitman has gone further in expression than any other man and (in 'Poetry of the Present') that his poetry surges into utterance at the very well-head, while in SP1 he asserts that the visionary, alien quality of American writing is subterranean and covert. The spontaneity of Whitmanesque free-verse language - its directness and simplicity - seems to contradict Lawrence's sense of inherent dualism, in which the moralist and somnambulist are at odds. If the poem is an instinctive utterance from the instant, whole man - if it is 'momentaneous', 'wind-like' and 'flexible as flame' (to use the language of 'Poetry of the Present') - then the desk-bound moralist and thinker would have neither the time nor the power to exert any control over the poem. So SP1 reflects back interestingly on the 'Poetry of the Present' essay, showing that Lawrence's agenda is different in each case. In 'Poetry of the Present' Whitman is the great spontaneous revealer - the poetic paradigm - while in SP1 he is the over-cultivated poet with an undercurrent of uncouth power and suggestion. In the first and second 'Whitman' essays he is the poet who has gone further in expression than any other, moving through externals to the quick, while in the third version he is primarily a post-mortem poet.

A further conceptual paradox lies in Lawrence's attitude towards 'oneness' or 'oneing' (see Lawrence, MS3, p.7) in SP1 and the first and second Whitman essays. In SP1 oneness is described as 'historic only': it is the concept of love or unison as merging, which has been superseded by Birkin's star-equilibrium ideal and by the idealised vision of America's 'otherness'. Yet problematically Whitman's poetry - a product of American otherness and presumably an embodiment of it - is ideologically dependent on the concepts of oneness, One Identity and Allness. In the first 'Whitman' essay Lawrence associates Allness with the vital circuit within an individual leading to wholeness and man's 'maximum or supreme state of consciousness': 'It is a state of living infinitude, when man really knows in full, when really he sees, not as through a glass, darkly, but distinctly and in totality. Supreme



consciousness, and the divine drunkenness of supreme consciousness, this is Whitman's revelation' (Lawrence, MS3, pp.3-4). Lawrence sees each accumulated identity as a 'vivid addition to the soul' (Lawrence, MS3, p.5), rather than an inevitable prelude to a loss of selfhood - or 'fatal halfness' - through which the soul's integrity is destroyed.<sup>27</sup> In the second version, his attitude towards this Whitmanesque Allness is still predominantly positive: he identifies it not with merging but with an all-embracing, indiscriminate 'passional' acceptance through which all is conquered.

However, the fact that Whitman's 'oneing' (version 1, p.7; also 'Two Principles', Lawrence, 1962, p.188) is really antithetical to Lawrence's isolation/recoil ideal is evident in his need to reinterpret and redefine (or distort) Whitman's categories. Whitman's Allness is made to encompass surges of chaotic vehemence and embrace (implying spontaneous, impulsive displays testifying to the soul's wholeness and integrity) while the merging process inevitably entailed in oneing is made two-directional. Merging with another being is balanced by the merging *away* from that being, the merging away being synonymous with Birkin's recoil into separateness. Underlying Lawrence's inherently paradoxical and particularly absurd adaptation of this key Whitmanesque concept is a sense of antagonism, and a latent refusal to accept Whitman on his own un-Lawrentian terms.

Ultimately Lawrence's celebration of his precursor is dependent on Whitman's transcendence of the 'merging' inherent in a man-woman relationship - a 'débâcle far too ignominious for a great man like Whitman' (Lawrence, MS3, p.13) - by the establishment of a 'last mystic unification', a 'final circuit of vital being impossible between man and woman' (Lawrence, MS3, p.13). It is the love of man for man - the love of comrades - that will

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence writes:

Some men find the hugest reality in the single, separate distinctness of the soul, an even starry aloofness: a supreme isolation: and isolation reached by infinite rejection, a rejection of All, leaving the one soul alone.

(Lawrence, MS3, p.4).

form the basis for a new creative unison, characterised by a 'polarisation' which will supersede the merging inevitably entailed in the process of oneing. The Gerald-Birkin relationship may be seen to underlie the process of selection by which Lawrence chooses and emphasises such poems as the 'Calamus' group, in which manly love is predominant. Conversely it may be argued that the Gerald-Birkin relationship has arisen as a consequence of Lawrence's espousal of the vision embodied in the poetry of his precursor. It may have been the reading of such poems as those in 'Calamus' that lead Lawrence to glimpse the creative possibilities inherent in a man-man relationship - or 'another kind of love' - culminating in the 'Gladiatorial' chapter in *Women in Love*. The man-man bond enables Lawrence to explore a kind of oneness that might be transcendental and remain distinct from merging - Gerald and Birkin are 'clinchd into oneness' when they fight - and thus to assign Whitman's concept to futurity rather than to history. Just as Lawrence adopted the free-verse form of his liberating precursor, so he may have adopted and embodied in his fiction a liberating vision that enabled him to explore the possibilities of a 'new love, upon which the new world, the new democracy will be established' (Lawrence, MS3, p.13).

Interestingly, manly love is, in Whitman's poetry, intimately bound up with the death-urge, for (in Lawrence's terms) any beings who have reached the 'last extreme of mutual knowledge' are 'balanced on the edge of death' (Lawrence, MS3, p.16). This is evident in the following lines from 'Scented Herbage of my Breast', in 'Calamus', from which Lawrence quotes (with slight discrepancies) in all three versions of his essay:

Yet you are beautiful to me, you faint-tinged roots, you make me think of death.  
Death is beautiful from you, (what indeed is finally beautiful except death and  
love?)  
O I think it is not for life I am chanting here my chant of lovers, I think it must  
be for death,  
For how calm, how solemn it grows to ascend to the atmosphere of lovers,  
Death or life I am then indifferent, my soul declines to prefer  
(I am not sure but the high soul of lovers welcomes death most,)



Indeed O death, I think now these leaves mean precisely the same as you mean ...  
(Whitman, 1973, p.114)

Lawrence celebrates Whitman not only as the poet who understood the polarity of manly love, but also as the great death-poet: the poet on the shore of the last sea, or the 'shaking sea of the beyond'. In Lawrence's conception of him, Whitman is rather like Gethin Day in 'The Flying-Fish' (written in March 1925) poised on the brink of vision: who reaches farther than any other because his illness (which causes the ordinary day to seem to have 'cracked like some great bubble') allows him to glimpse 'through the fissures the deeper blue of that other Greater Day where moved the other sun shaking its dark blue wings' (Lawrence, 1983b, p.209). Yet Gethin's vision remains flawed or incomplete, for completion of the vision could only result in death. Whitman's vision also is necessarily truncated, because '[his] camp is at the edge of a great precipice. Over the precipice, blue distances, and the blue hollow of the future. But there is no way down. It is a dead end. / Pisgah. Pisgah sights. And Death' (Lawrence, 1971a, pp.179-80). In both 'The Flying-Fish' and the 1923 Whitman essay, Lawrence associates ultimate vision (whose extra-terrestrial strangeness is emphasised by the images of the 'blue hollow of the future' and the 'other sun shaking its dark blue wings' with a brink or precipice, symbolising the margin between life and bodily death. Similarly, in 'Chaos in Poetry', Lawrence asserts that when the umbrella shielding mankind from 'chaos', 'vision' and the 'sun' is blown to ribbons by 'some terrific wind', the wind will also blow 'much of mankind to oblivion', and leave the remainder to shiver in the midst of chaos. The close correlation between ultimate vision and death in Lawrence's thinking about Whitman (as well as his belief that Whitman was the great death-poet) explains the extent and significance of this particular poetic influence on the *Last Poems*, concerned predominantly with death and the 'afterwards'.

Lawrence ends his first version of the Whitman essay with a salutation, asserting that 'I, being what I am, salute you, Whitman, before any other man,

because I owe the last strides into freedom to you' (Lawrence, MS3, p.20). Such an assertion appears to be an ultimate acknowledgement and affirmation of indebtedness: an unequivocally positive celebration of the nature of poetic influence. Lawrence attributes the liberation of his own mode of expression to his precursor, in a way that seems ostensibly to contradict Harold Bloom's sense of an underlying anxiety in all intra-poetic relationships. Yet Lawrence had by no means taken the 'last strides' in his engagement with Whitman (the passage itself is an insertion over a simpler, deleted statement that 'Whitman is the greatest man since Shakespeare'). And when considered in the light of the initial ending, the 1923 version of the essay seems oddly inconsistent, suggesting, perhaps, that the extent of Lawrence's own adulatory tribute caused considerable retrospective unease. By the time of writing the final version, Lawrence's enthusiasm for his precursor has shifted to the opposite extreme, so that his attitude appears to be one of hostility and antagonism. The shift is radical - yet it is less surprising when the following passage from SP1 is considered:

It is absolutely necessary to realise once and for all that every enthusiasm, every passion, has a dual motion: first a motion of liberation, of setting free, and secondly a motion of vindictive repression of the living impulse, the utter subjection of the living, spontaneous being to the fixed, mechanical, ultimately unsure will.

(Lawrence, 1962, pp.25-6)

Poetic influence - itself a passion or an enthusiasm - can be at first liberating and then repressive: it can enable a developing poet to find a voice but (if this poet does not strike out on another path) can constitute the ultimate limitation of his vision and expression. As Lawrence says in the first 'Whitman' essay: '[Whitman] is the fulfilment of the great old truth. But any truth, immediately it is fulfilled, accomplished [will] become *ipso facto* a lie, a deadly limitation to truth' (Lawrence, MS3, p.1). The 'dual motion' inherent in Lawrence's response to Whitman lies in his acknowledgement of his liberating 'truth' or insight, and the simultaneous rejection of the 'lie' that constitutes the limitation



or fixity of Whitman's vision. In the first and second versions of the essay Lawrence is primarily concerned with Whitman the liberator; in the third he places his emphasis on Whitman the liar. In the latter, he suggests that Whitman's 'truth' - having been fulfilled - is now simply a limitation: *all* he is now is a 'post mortem' poet.

Lawrence attributes Whitman's 'post-mortem effects' to the process he had previously considered in all the 1919 versions of the American essays, including the first surviving 'Whitman': the mentalising of the lower centres and the 'passional' self. A striking difference in response becomes evident on consideration of the 1919 and 1923 versions: in the first, the subordination of the lower centres by the upper is seen as a positive process which enables a vital circuit - and consequently a wholeness - to be established. The wholeness or oneness arising from the establishment of this circuit leads to sudden, blinding visionary insight, which can even result in the death of the seer. This oneness-of-wholeness is distinct from the predominantly negative 'merging' process by which a person's identity seeps out and is subsumed by every living thing in an external reality. Yet in the 1923 essay the 'mentalising' of the 'passional' self and the promiscuity of indiscriminate merging become indistinguishable - they are both symptoms of a degeneration into mechanisation:

Matter gravitates because it *is* helpless and mechanical.  
And if you gravitate the same, if the body of you gravitates to  
all you meet and know, why, something must have gone seriously  
wrong with you.. You must have broken your main-spring.  
You must have fallen also into mechanization...  
You have killed your isolate Moby Dick. You have mentalized  
your deep sensual body, and that's the death of it.  
(Lawrence, 1971a, p.173)

Lawrence, having previously conceived of the internal mentalisation-process as a truth (or at least a half-truth) and the external promiscuity-merging as a lie, now dismisses both as fixed ideas that have become lies. This truth-lie progression is analogous to the process described in 'Poetry of the Present', in

which poets make slits in the simulacrum-parasol that protects man from the chaos of vision; until the visionary insight itself becomes so familiar that it is used as just another patch. Whitman's poetry, which was once visionary, has now become merely a 'patch': merely another product of a 'world of mechanical self-assertion' (Lawrence, 1993a, p.511).

*Lawrence, Whitman and their worlds; dual motions and multiple moralities.*

Lawrence's awareness of *his* 'world' is in itself significant in undermining any sense we may have of these essays as primarily concerned with literature. Whitman is not simply envisaged as a literary figure: he is also the culture-hero who was in fact (briefly) contemporaneous with Lawrence, so that Lawrence is able to make Whitman a paradigm of 'modernity'. Consequently Lawrence's perception of his precursor is inevitably coloured by his attitude towards his 'age' at the time of writing the essays. The first draft's passion and enthusiasm - attributable in part to a presumably genuine acknowledgement of positive indebtedness - is simultaneously an expression of the hope for mankind experienced by Lawrence in 1919. At this time even the recent upheaval of the war seemed to him to have been unable to quench the hidden, creative potential that artists would soon unleash, thus providing mankind with the opportunity for a fresh start. In the 1919 version of the 'Whitman' essay Lawrence attributes to Whitman a knowledge of the essential elements on which the fresh, transcendent life will be based: 'He discovered manly love, love of comrades. He knew a new world would depend on this newly-discovered love' (Lawrence, MS3, p.17). Similarly in SP1 Lawrence articulates his hope for progression and newness: 'There will come an America which we cannot foretell, a new creation on the face of the earth, a world beyond us' (Lawrence, 1962, pp.25-6). Both America and Whitman are here made to serve a purpose: the former is made an embodiment of Lawrence's sense of creative potential,



while the latter is afforded the ability to perceive, predict and even catalyse the unleashing of this new life.

By 1922-3, however, Lawrence's attitude towards society and in particular America had altered considerably.

The world fears a new experience more than it fears anything...

The world doesn't fear a new idea. It can pigeon-hole any idea. But it can't pigeon-hole a real new experience. It can only dodge. The world is a great dodger, and the Americans the greatest. Because they dodge their own very selves. (Lawrence, 1971a, p.7)

In the last version of 'The Spirit of Place' America is still seen as having some latent power and a kind of magnetism: yet the emphasis is placed on the inability of the 'dodgers' to perceive and respond to the vibrant undertones. This attitude seems a radicalised but logical progression from the assertion in the first 'Whitman' essay that there is no race or people yet in existence that is worthy of 'the best Whitman'. Perhaps the significant difference is that in 1919 Lawrence could be content with considering potential newness, potential vision, potential growth; while in 1922-3 he was aware that the hoped-for revolution or revelation had not occurred, and was indeed impeded by further obstacles. If this is the case, then the vehemence of the later 'Americanised' (Lawrence, 1987b, p.338) versions of the *Studies* is attributable to an attempt at upheaval: an attempt to startle the dodgers into an acknowledgement of their own evasion of the truths inherent in the undertone of art-speech. Lawrence is not merely indulging in a 'violent, unthinking outpouring of feelings and perceptions; unselected, unarranged, and expressed with a conscious disregard for personal dignity' (Conrad Aiken, *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, 12 July 1924). Rather he is consciously adopting a style, albeit a 'coal-heaver style' (Stuart P. Sherman, *NY Evening Post, Lit Review*, 20 October 1923), a 'positive, staccato, repetitious style' (Kurt L. Daniels, *New Republic*, 24 October 1923), in order to create a particular effect. The 1923 essays are analogous with Donne's 'Satires' in this respect: they make use of bludgeoning, vehement, awkward rhythms and appear to be unregulated and

spontaneous, yet on consideration they are revealed to be carefully constructed, with the words arranged to greater effect than in the 1918-19 prose.

The emphasis in SP3, for example, is on the dodgers who fail to respond to the resonance of art-speech. Lawrence is not deconstructing the concept of the artist as seer, although he has condensed the moralist/somnambulist dichotomy issue into the following words:

The artist usually sets out - or used to - to point a moral and adorn a tale. The tale, however, points the other way, as a rule. Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.

Now we know our business in these studies; saving the American tale from the American artist. (Lawrence, 1971a, pp.8-9)

The passage (directly quoting from Dr Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes': 'To point a moral and adorn a tale', see Johnson, 1941, p.41) is reliant on the somnambulist-conception of the artist, who infuses his art-speech with significance and some kind of 'truth' in spite of himself. Yet in the third 'Whitman' essay it is the integrity of the truth underlying the art-speech that is questioned, as well as the status of the poet/culture-hero:

His poems, *Democracy*, *En Masse*, *One Identity*, they are long sums in addition and multiplication, of which the answer is invariably MYSELF.

He reaches the state of ALLNESS.  
And what then? It's all empty. Just an empty ALLNESS. An addled egg. (Lawrence, 1971a, p.175)<sup>28</sup>

It seems here that Lawrence's criticism is 'merging' the two facets of his response to the poetry of Whitman, and that he is so-doing for the purpose of his rhetoric. He is implying that the poetry - the art-speech itself - is 'empty', when the objection he is really articulating here is an objection to the concept of Allness, which Lawrence had necessarily to redefine earlier in order to

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<sup>28</sup> Notably Lawrence is not actually referring to poem titles - as the text may suggest - but to key words that appear in a number of poems. His rhetoric is taking over.



conceive it as positive. The objection testifies to a *conceptual* 'recoil' from Whitman - and a recoil which is explicable in terms of Lawrence's changing attitude towards 'love' - just as Lawrence's shift in attitude towards America is in part attributable to his changing responses to his (limitedly unprogressive) contemporary society.<sup>29</sup>

However, it is acknowledged in *Aaron's Rod* that extremity of recoil is generally a consequence of an extremity of love:

'That's the recoil of the same urge. The anarchist, the criminal, the murderer, he is only the extreme lover acting on the recoil. But it is love: only in recoil. It flies back, the love-urge, and becomes a horror.' (Lawrence, 1988a, p.294)

Lawrence's recoil from Whitman in this third version of the essay may be considered as an inevitable result of an excess of love and indebtedness. Consequently the 'horror' inherent in Lawrence's sense of Whitman's poetry as

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<sup>29</sup> By 1922-23 (as can be seen in his fiction, such as *Kangaroo* and *The Boy in the Bush*) Lawrence is in recoil against the very idea of 'love'. In a letter to Earl Brewster of May, 1921, he writes as follows:

I here and now, finally and forever give up knowing anything about love, or wanting to know. I believe it doesn't exist, save as a word: a sort of wailing phoenix that is really the wind in the trees. - In fact I here and now, finally and forever leave off loving anything or everything or anybody. Basta la mossa! (Lawrence, 1984, p.718)

Similarly, in *Aaron's Rod* the protagonist moves beyond the merging intimacy of love into a stark individuality - and even when drawn into a man-man bond he receives the following warning:

'You've got an innermost, integral, unique self, and since it's the only thing you have got or ever will have, don't go trying to lose it. You've got to develop it...into the one-and-only phoenix, of which there can only be one at a time in the universe. There can only be one of you at a time in the universe-and one of me. So don't forget it. Your own single oneness is your destiny...You can only stick to your own very self, and *never* betray it.'

(Lawrence, 1988a, p.295)

Here 'oneness' is the antithesis of merging (in Harold Bloom's terms, the word has been adopted and applied antithetically, as in his 'Tessera' category). The preservation of uniqueness and integrity is the only valuable 'goal', and merging of any kind would be a betrayal of the phoenix-self. The last 'Whitman' essay was written eighteen months after this novel, and Lawrence's rejection of the 'love' ideal entails a rejection of the poet inevitably associated with it.

'empty' involves a falsification of the 'dual motion' which compels Lawrence to acknowledge Whitman as *both* 'A great prophet' and 'a great swindle'; *both* 'the greatest of all modern truths' and 'the greatest of modern humbugs' (Lawrence, MS3, p.1). For in his rather flippant use of the term 'empty' Lawrence is not making the necessary distinction between ideology and art-speech or expression. (It is significant that only in the first version of the essay does Lawrence allude specifically to Whitman's verse-form, and to the kind of poetic language that sets him beside Dante and Shakespeare.) In the 1923 version a duality of response *is* at last evident when an articulation of the extreme recoil from Whitman (culminating in his sense of the poetry as 'empty') is followed by an acknowledgement and even celebration of the initial love-urge:

Whitman, the great poet, has meant so much to me. Whitman, the one man breaking a way ahead. Whitman, the one pioneer. And only Whitman. No English pioneers, no French...Ahead of Whitman, nothing...And lots of new little poets camping on Whitman's camping ground now. But none really going beyond. Because Whitman's camp is at the end of the road, and on the edge of a great precipice. Over the precipice, blue distances, and the blue hollow of the future. But there is no way down. It is a dead end.

(Lawrence, 1971a, p.179)

The image of Whitman as 'the one pioneer' constitutes the positive pole of Lawrence's response; just as the sense of emptiness is the negative pole. Yet the positive response evident in the above passage is to some extent undermined by the final sentences: 'But there is no way down. It is a dead end'. Poetry that reaches a 'dead end' or impasse becomes poetry of the past rather than the present, and the new poet must somehow find a way beyond it. In his 'Introduction' to *Memoirs of the Foreign Legion*, Lawrence describes the feelings he experienced when looking down on the trains and swarming people of modernity, from the elevated standpoint of an old monastery:



To see all this from the monastery, where the Middle Ages live on in a sort of agony, like Tithonus, and cannot die, this was almost a violation to my soul, made almost a wound. (Lawrence, 1968, p.319)

Lawrence's agony results from his knowledge that he - as 'child of the present' - must break free from the 'poignant grip of the past' in order to go down and inhabit the modern world. Similarly he - as poet of the present (a label he once assigned to Whitman) - must take another road which does not lead to the dead-end brink.

The two images of Whitman as pioneer and post-mortem poet cannot comfortably co-exist, as is evident in the paradoxical ending of the last Whitman essay:

Love, and Merging, brought Whitman to the Edge of Death!  
Death! Death!

But the exultance of his message still remains. Purified of MERGING, purified of MYSELF, the exultant message of American Democracy, of souls in the Open Road, full of glad recognition, full of fierce readiness, full of the joy of worship, when one soul sees a greater soul.

The only riches, the great souls. (Lawrence, 1971a, p.187)

This passage reveals that Lawrence is - as usual - using Whitman for his own purposes, rather than reading him on his own terms. He wants Whitman's message, purified of the very concepts that lie at the heart or root of that message. After rejecting the Whitmanesque 'merging' with vehemence, Lawrence ends his essay positively by emphasising the only aspect of Whitman's writing that is in line with his own thinking at the time. Whitman has become a vehicle for articulating Lawrence's latest ideal of isolation or otherness: the ideal made manifest in Aaron's decision to walk away and to take the Open Road.

It is possible to interpret the 'dual motion' of creative response to Whitman in terms of the distinction between two opposing concepts of 'morality'. In the 1923 version Lawrence asserts that the 'essential function of art is moral', and defines morality as something which 'changes the blood,

rather than the mind. Changes the blood first. The mind follows later, in the wake'. He then proceeds: 'Now Whitman was a great moralist. He was a great leader. He was a great changer of the blood in the veins of men' (Lawrence, 1971, p.180). Lawrence is here applying the term 'morality' in a very different sense from the way in which he uses the term in the moralist/somnambulist dichotomy. The morality that Lawrence associates with the changing of the blood is a 'passionate, implicit morality, not didactic': it is synonymous with the role of somnambulist or demon whose art embodies a truth or vision. It seems then that the dual motion can be understood in terms of the two antithetical versions of 'morality' employed here: on the one hand the morality of the overseer, sitting at his desk and attempting to exert control, to regulate; and on the other hand the implicit, 'passional' blood-changing morality of the seer or somnambulist. The former may be termed 'explicit morality' and is produced in the upper, cerebral centres within a human being; while the latter, the 'implicit morality', corresponds with the lower centres of 'passional' unregulated spontaneity.

In the first Whitman essay, Lawrence is emphasising his response to the 'implicit morality' of his precursor, acknowledging the changing of his own blood in response. In the 1923 version Lawrence emphasises - with the purpose of deconstructing - the 'explicit morality' or didactic intention. It might be said that Lawrence is predominantly an explicit moralist in the last essay, sitting at his desk and judging in an attempt to regulate his material and his own response to that material. Yet he also acknowledges the implicit morality, and applies the blood-changing terminology to Whitman's verse for the first time. In Lawrence's poetry, and in particular his late poems, we see evidence of a response to both the implicit and explicit moralities of Whitman as they are here expressed: Lawrence responds both as a didactic moralist and as a somnambulist. His early poetry gives evidence of a 'flooded apprenticeship' - and the engagement is characterised unequivocally by the enthusiasm expressed in the first Whitman essay. Yet in the *Last Poems*, in which he explores the key



Whitmanesque issues of life, death, merging and individuality, the enthusiasm co-exists with the recoil inherent in the 1923 response. So these late poems reveal the complexity of the 'dual motion' which characterises poetic influence at its most advanced, and its most paradoxical. As Lawrence asserts in the first Whitman essay: 'paradoxes are a real nuisance to us. But let us sit down to them' (Lawrence, MS3, p.1).

**Last Poems: *Touch and tendrils; sex and sympathy; death and an unhampering.***

In the 1919 essay, Lawrence celebrates Whitman as the poet of touch. He explores, in relation to Whitman, the developing relationship between the upper and lower centres of the body, in a way that is analogous to the Freudian conception of the development of an infant, yet differs in crucial respects. Lawrence attributes Freud's antithetical basic instincts - 'Eros' and 'The Destructive Instinct' - to a physical division between the upper and lower 'planes'. The distinction between these two planes seems to correlate to some extent with Freud's formulation (as articulated by the translator James Strachey): 'The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus - in short, to bind together; the aim of the second, on the contrary, is to undo connections and so to destroy things' (Freud, 1949, p.6). Yet in *Studies* Lawrence seems to be off on a Jungian and esoteric track, and is avoiding Freud. Lawrence's division is not seen as necessarily destructive: he describes the way in which the hands and fingers - 'living tendrils' of the upper spiritual centres - gather and control the 'sheer sex motions', so that the upper self creates a circuit by reacting upon and taking control of the lower. The hands or 'tendrils' are instrumental in the process by which control of the lower regions is established: and it is interesting to note that 'Tendrils' was a title suggested by Lawrence for his first novel, *The White Peacock*. In this novel, we find both his first exploration of the potential for a

manly bond, which is founded on the satisfaction derived from physical closeness. Cyril swims with George, then, as they dry themselves with towels:

He saw I had forgotten to continue my rubbing, and laughing he took hold of me and began to rub me briskly, as if I were a child, or rather, a woman he loved and did not fear. I left myself quite limply in his hands, and, to get a better grip of me, he put his arm round me and pressed me against him, and the sweetness of the touch of our naked bodies one against the other was superb.

(Lawrence, 1983a, p.222)

The simplicity of this mutual pleasure is striking when a comparison is made with the later portrayal of manly love in *Women in Love*. The portrayal seems to derive from a Whitmanesque belief in the pure divinity of the body, and the sense that the physical form has sufficient meaning in itself to provide infinite satisfaction:

Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes  
and is the soul,

Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body, or any part of it!  
(Whitman, 1973, p.24)

Even in the 1923 essay Lawrence acknowledges Whitman to be the great innovator in terms of his conception of the soul-body tie: he was the poet who commanded the soul to 'Stay in the flesh. Stay in the limbs and lips and in the belly. Stay in the breast and womb. Stay there, Oh, Soul, where you belong' (Lawrence, 1971a, p.180).

As Lawrence considered Whitman to be the great poet of physicality, of touch, love and sex, it is unsurprising that his own love-language is at times very similar to that of his precursor. The following passages, from Whitman's 'I Sing the Body Electric' and Lawrence's 'Whales Weep Not!' respectively, both describing a sex act, exemplify such linguistic engagement:

Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of love,  
white-blow and delirious juice,  
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,  
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,



Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day.  
(Whitman, 1973, p.96).

there they blow, there they blow, hot white wild breath out of the seal...

in the clasp and the soft, wild clutch of a she-whale's fathomless body.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.6; 1993a, p.694)

Whitman's terms suggestive of profusion and heat - 'limitless', 'hot and enormous' - find an equivalent in Lawrence's depiction of the huge, 'fathomless' she-whale with 'hot' wild breath. The terms 'blow' and 'white' are used in both passages, while the sense of intoxication and recklessness is expressed by the terms 'delirious' and 'wild' respectively. In Whitman's lines the Bridegroom night of love works surely and 'softly' into the dawn, while Lawrence describes the 'soft' wild clutch of the she-whale's body. The 'cleave of the clasping...day' and 'the clasp and the soft, wild clutch' again suggest a similarly uninhibited response to the physicality of the union described.<sup>30</sup> There is perhaps evidence of intertextuality. Yet there are important differences between such poems. Whitman is using the day/night metaphor to describe a sexual encounter while Lawrence is partly concerned with portraying a sex-act that is crucially distinct from that which is experienced by a human couple. The mating of whales - unlike the mating of humans - can be an embodiment of a 'unison within separateness' which transcends merging, as the title 'Whales Weep Not!' suggests. However, despite the differences between the passages, they reveal that Lawrence has learnt a great deal from the language and the sexual daring of his precursor.

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<sup>30</sup> A passage from *Moby Dick*, quoted by Lawrence in all his essays on this novel (in which Melville is being deliberately constructed as a contemporary to Whitman) may well have influenced his description of the whales:

In the midst of this preluding silence came the first cry: 'There she blows! there! there! there! She blows!' And then comes the first chase, a marvellous piece of true sea-writing, the sea, and sheer sea-beings on the chase, sea-creatures chased. There is scarcely a taint of earth - pure sea motion. (Lawrence, 1971a, p.160)

Hence Lawrence's concern with Whitman as the poet of physical love and procreation - of wombs, and the 'bath of birth' (a phrase that originates in Whitman's poem 'I Sing the Body Electric', line 65) - in the 1919 essay. Whitman himself acknowledges the significance of this preoccupation:

From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus,  
Singing the song of procreation.  
(Whitman, 1973, p.91)

The phrase 'bath of birth' and the term 'procreation' have particular relevance when considering Lawrence's poem 'Ship of Death': a poem which can be illuminated by a consideration of its surprising affinity with key ideas and images evident particularly in the first of the Whitman essays. In this essay the close correlation between birth and death is made evident in Lawrence's formulation of a dichotomy involving man's bath of birth, which he loves; and that which constitutes/occasions his death, which he hates mystically. The bath of birth and lake of death are yoked together in the womb/tomb elision (Lawrence, MS3, p.12), which Lawrence rather vaguely attributes to 'somebody' (it is actually in Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 86'). In this essay, Lawrence is concerned with establishing the supremacy and profundity of the 'love of comrades' over heterosexual love; he creates a dichotomy between the 'fiery corruption' that characterises the activity of the former, and the 'watery corruption' of the latter. The wateriness, symptomatic of the merging process, leads to dissolution: and ultimately to death. Lawrence uses the phrase 'waters of the end' in order to describe the 'spent' fluids that are the result of the merging process. Yet, paradoxically, these waters referred to as a 'lake of death' also become the 'bath of birth', as man is born again of woman, 'in sheer merging'. This rebirth liberates the upper centres, but destroys the lower, 'passional' centres and violates the isolate self: consequently it should not be seen as the ultimate goal. It is like Allness, which can only be attained at the cost of the 'death of the self', despite being the accession to infinitude. In Lawrence's terms: 'The goal of the *spirit*, or the consciousness, may be



Infinity. But once the spirit, or the consciousness, surpasses into the Infinite, the single soul is dead. The self is dead. The Infinite is therefore Death' (Lawrence, MS3, p.6). The 'goal' must be projected beyond merging, and, by implication, beyond Infinity which is death.

The links between Whitman, Lawrence's way of thinking about Whitman, and Lawrence's poems 'Ship of Death' and 'The Ship of Death' are striking. The following lines (from 'The Ship of Death') in particular relate very directly to the early essay. The death-ship is sailing

upon the flood's black waste  
upon the waters of the end  
upon the sea of death, where still we sail  
darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.24; 1993a, p.719)

Here, the phrase 'waters of the end', previously describing the spent fluids of sexual intercourse and childbirth, is now applied to the 'last of seas', over which the death-ship must sail. When the death-ship sinks into the 'waters of the end' it is therefore undergoing the ultimate merging. It is subsumed into Infinity (here termed Oblivion), fulfilling Lawrence's prediction that the extremity of merging is synonymous with soul-death:

And everything is gone, the body is gone  
completely under, gone, entirely gone.  
The upper darkness is heavy on the lower,  
between them the little ship  
is gone  
she is gone.

It is the end, it is oblivion.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.25; 1993a, p.719)

The 'lake of death' of the essay has thus become the 'sea of death' of the poem. Yet this sea appears to be a bath of birth as well as a death-lake, as in 'Ship of Death' Lawrence refers to the 'foldings and involvings of a womb' and

the 'womb-like convoluted shadow', before the process of dissolution is described as follows:

...and the boat dissolves like pearl  
as the soul at last slips perfect into the goal, the core  
of sheer oblivion and of utter peace,  
the womb of silence in the living night.

Ah peace, ah lovely peace, most lovely lapsing  
of this my soul into the plasm of peace.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.68; 1993a, p.964)

The sea or lake of death embodies exactly the womb/tomb paradox referred to in the 1919 essay, and the lapse into the wonder-goal is merely the sensual merging process taken to its logical conclusion. Adopting the terms of the first Whitman essay, it entails the ecstasy of giving oneself utterly, passing away into the physicality of the other like a 'spent breath'. This self-loss, according to Lawrence, is a kind of delirium as sharp as death or sheer delight: he refers to the 'Terrible blade-cut of the sensual death', which he situates in the negative polarity (Lawrence, MS3, p.8).

However, Lawrence, even in the early essay, expresses the need for a re-establishment of self, beyond the sheer merging or passing away into the wonder-goal. He argues that *after* fulfilment the human soul is liberated, and able to 'blossom spontaneous from itself' (Lawrence, MS3, p.7). Similarly 'Ship of Death' hints at the possibility of 'procreation', while 'The Ship of Death' deals at greater length with the emergence of the little soul, who steps 'into the house again / filling the heart with peace'. It is significant that at the end of this poem although Lawrence has 'swerved' from Whitman by progressing (conceptually) beyond the wonder-goal to a new assertion of self-hood and integrity, his conception of the new 'self' is reliant on a Whitmanesque version of the union of body and soul. Lawrence sets the soul back in the body where it really belongs, and tells it to stay there, now that is renewed by proceeding through and beyond Allness.



Implicit in 'Ship of Death' also is an engagement with the Whitmanesque 'sympathy' which has its roots in the merging process. This is manifested in the expressed attitude towards the outcast dead who are roaming on the margins of life, waiting for a 'common barge' to carry them across the sea of death. The three stanzas concerned with the plight of these marginalised souls begin with the exhortations: 'Oh pity the dead...'; 'Pity, oh pity the poor dead...' and 'Pity the poor gaunt dead.../ and think of them, and with the soul's deep sigh / waft nearer to them the bark of delivery'. I have introduced as one poetic context/intertext for these stanzas the doctrine of 'universal benevolence' propounded by Godwin and encountered by Lawrence in *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*. I will introduce here one other (chosen from among a multiplicity of possibilities), as this 'pity' seems to involve the kind of sympathetic response to suffering that underlies Whitman's preaching, and against which Lawrence reacts in his late poem 'Retort to Whitman':

And whoever walks a mile full of false sympathy  
walks to the funeral of the whole human race.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.38; 1993a, p.653)

This retort is a direct response to the lines from Whitman's 'Song of Myself' quoted by Lawrence in all three versions of the essay: 'And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud' (Whitman, 1973, p.86). Lawrence's objection to sympathy here is not in any sense a symptom of callousness; rather it is a recoil from a kind of promiscuous imposition. A conscious attempt to be sympathetic will lead only to false sympathy, for the preservation of the integral self relies on the ability to discern and discriminate, and it also allows others to remain free and unmerged. Genuine sympathy necessitates a spontaneous response to suffering, such as the pity provoked by the plight of the gaunt dead gnashing and wailing on the margins. It is significant, too, that the single soul protagonist of the poem can be aware of these sufferers, and even participate in their deliverance, while remaining principally occupied with the building of his own death-ship, unique

and distinct from the 'common barge'. So the soul in 'Ship of Death' is being human without attempting to be 'superhuman', which would inevitably lead to a loss of self.

In 'Ship of Death', then, sympathy (although not the false and forced sympathy described in Lawrence's version of Whitman) remains co-existent with the preservation of individual integrity. However, in other poems in which Lawrence articulates a response to the fate of the mechanised multitude the sympathy/recoil urges are shown to be irreconcilably antithetical. Interestingly, Lawrence's response to Whitman in the 1923 essay is symptomatic of the positive, 'sympathetic' attitude:

Oh, Walter, Walter, what have you done with it? What have  
you done with yourself? With your own individual self? For it sounds  
as if it had all leaked out of you, leaked into the universe.

(Lawrence, 1971a, p.173)

Lawrence's sense that a man who has become merged and mechanised is a suitable target for genuine sympathy is similarly expressed in the following lines, taken from the poem 'What Have They Done to You?':

What have they done to you, men of the masses, creeping back and forth to  
work?

What have they done to you, the saviours of the people, oh what have they  
saved you from, while they pocketed the money?

(Lawrence, MS1, p.22; 1993a, p.630).

These lines implicitly reveal the nature of 'false' sympathy, which Lawrence associates with the hypocritical assertions made by the advocates of the machine and industrialisation. False sympathy, it seems, results in the most catastrophic form of merging: the merging of the masses into a single manipulable unit, leading to a degeneration into mechanisation and a loss of 'separateness' or 'otherness'. Conversely genuine sympathy is the response of a single man in his otherness to a situation in which he sees others forfeiting their



otherness. It can involve a violence of response that must be purely spontaneous and never forced or calculated:

For oh the poor people, that are flesh of my flesh  
 I, that am flesh of their flesh,  
 when I see the iron hooked into their faces  
 their poor, their fearful faces  
 I scream in my soul, for I know I cannot  
 take the iron hook out of their faces, that makes them so drawn...  
 (Lawrence, MS1, p.23; 1993a, p.632)

This response might involve genuine rather than false sympathy, yet it seems that it entails the same 'merging' tendencies which prevent a 'single' man from remaining distinct and unimplicated. In 'We Die Together' the admission is made that 'I know the unliving factory-hand, living-dead millions / is unliving me, living-dead me, / I, with them, am living-dead, mechanical enslaved at the machine' (Lawrence, 1992a, p.213).<sup>31</sup> Whitman has become mechanised through merging, while Lawrence admits here that his own sympathy (albeit distinct from that with which he credits Whitman) results in an inevitable personal and political identification with his fellow-men.

Hence the recoil in certain poems against this kind of enslaving identification; the recoil from things like the following assertion by Whitman in 'Starting from Paumanok':

Of and through the States as during life, each man and woman my  
 neighbor (Whitman, 1973, p.25)

Lawrence revolts - as he had against Christianity, for the same kind of reason - against what he sees as this promiscuity of identification, asserting that the masses are not his fellow-men, so 'let them serve'. This recoil from neighbourly love is evident in the poem 'Love thy Neighbour', which is in itself a retort both to Whitman and to Jesus:

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<sup>31</sup> I have quoted from Mara Kalnins' *D.H. Lawrence: Selected Poems* here, as in Pinto/Roberts' *Complete Poems* the word 'enslaved' has been incorrectly omitted from the poem (see Lawrence, 1993a, p.629).

I love my neighbour  
but  
are these things my neighbours?  
these two-legged things that walk and talk  
and eat and cachinate, and even seem to smile  
even to smile, ye gods!

Am I told that these things are my neighbours?

All I can say then is Nay! nay! nay! nay! nay!  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.33; 1993a, p.644)

The attitude expressed in this poem is directly antithetical to that expressed (for example) in 'We Die Together', and these two poems embody the dual motion that characterises Lawrence's response to Whitman's explicit morality and explicit sympathy.

Lawrence's 1929 vision of a new world, a future, is expressed in the four poems entitled: 'Future Relationships', 'Future Religion', 'Future States' and 'Future War'. These poems neatly epitomise the dual motion of Lawrence's creative response to Whitman in relation both to Whitman's implicit and explicit moralities. In 'Future Relationships' Lawrence asserts that the world is moving towards a new democracy (one of Whitman's key terms) and more specifically a 'democracy of touch'. Whitman, the poet of touch, is thus afforded the status of seer, who has predicted the way forward. Yet the touch cannot merely be that symptomatic of merging: it must come after a 'pure aloneness, which is permanent', a view strikingly similar to that expressed in the 1919 'Whitman' essay. This new touch, paradoxically co-existent with the permanency and purity of 'aloneness', will result in 'all the differences given expression'. It is distinct from both merging and oneing, for a preoccupation with oneness is ultimately damaging: 'Oneness makes war, and the obsession of oneness'. In these poems, then, Lawrence engages with Whitman's key concepts, and reinterprets them in order to ascertain how the concepts might better be formulated and expressed.



In this way he responds to the 'explicit morality' inherent in Whitman's poetry: to the ideas expressed and to the concepts that form the basis of Whitman's ideology. Yet there is evidence of a more subtle duality or underlying paradox, concerned with the 'implicit morality' - with Whitman as changer of the blood. Lawrence the somnambulist, responding to the implicit morality of Whitman, is revealing the profundity and extent of his indebtedness, even when his ostensible attitude towards the explicit morality of Whitman is negative. This is evident throughout Lawrence's *Last Poems*: in the choice of language and verse-form, in the titles (often very closely related to Whitman's preoccupations, for example: 'Democracy', 'Thought', 'Glimpses', 'Future States', 'Leaves of Grass, Flowers of Grass') and in the sense of liberating spontaneity. Lawrence's late poetry is characterised by the 'straightforward and direct' mode of expression which he associated with and learned from Whitman at his best. Such similarity of language is evident in the following passages - the first from Whitman's 'Me Imperturbe', the second and third from Lawrence's 'Flowers and Men' and 'Gladness of Death' respectively:

To confront night, storms, hunger, ridicule, accidents, rebuffs, as the  
trees and animals do.  
(Whitman, 1973, p.11))

...all I want of you  
is that you shall achieve your own beauty  
as the flowers do.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.66; 1993a, p.683)

I have always wanted to be as the flowers are  
so unhampered in their living and dying,  
and in death I believe I shall be as the flowers are.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.58; 1993a, p.677)

Whitman's death-vision helps Lawrence to formulate his sense of an 'unhampered' consciousness in the face of death; just as Whitman's poetic form offers Lawrence a mode of expression that will be similarly 'unhampered'. A

further stylistic parallel becomes evident on consideration of the repetitive and incantatory (yet 'direct') nature of the poems 'Sea-Drift' (quoted and termed 'lovely and great' by Lawrence) and the poem section 'Memories of President Lincoln' (quoted erroneously by Lawrence as 'Memories of President Wilson'!). The repetitions of 'death' evoking the voice of the 'lisp[ing]' sea and the phrase 'serenely arriving, arriving' bear strong resemblances to Lawrence's 'repetitive, cyclical style' - evident in poems such as 'Butterfly', 'Shadows' and 'The Ship of Death'- in which he attempts 'to approach an understanding of death and immortality...through the subtle modulation of associated images and symbols' (Kalnins, 1992, p.17).

A poem, then, that is an explicit retort to explicit morality can still be a celebration of poetic indebtedness, engaging with an implicit morality at a deeper level. Even the fact that it is explicitly a retort does not mean necessarily that the engagement with the poetic precursor is negative: while Blake asserts that 'Without Contraries is no Progression', Harold Bloom argues that a 'swerve' from the precursor is essential, in order for the new poet or ephebe to carve out his passage, and to find his own voice. Lawrence, in his dual motion of creative response to Whitman, reveals a profundity of indebtedness which was in his case also liberating: so that he preserves his poetic otherness, and gives expression to multiple differences of perspective, in his *Last Poems*.



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## Chapter 4 Return of Returns: Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*

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### *Beyond poetry: a wider intertextual dimension.*

any text is part of the system 'Text', and may draw on intertexts from any other subset within it. These include not just literary codes, but other discourses more usually classified as non-literary, such as history, science, philosophy and politics, all of which found their parameters being established during the enlightenment.

(Orr, 1993, p.59)

So far I have focused on significant poetry and poets in my study of intertextuality in *Last Poems*. I intend now to move on to texts inhabiting other genres, in order to adhere to the broader conception of 'Text' offered in the above quotation. In her intertextual study of Claude Simon (discussed in chapter 1) Mary Orr emphasises the 'interdisciplinary aspects of Simon's intertextuality' (Orr, 1993, p.60), and examines the 'paraliterary codes' which encompass 'metatextual discourse' (in this category she includes medical textbooks; astronomical and geographical studies; travelogues; ornithologies; political oratory works and encyclopaedia: see p.64). According to Orr intertextuality - which 'spans all languages, types of discourse and media' (Orr, 1993, p.3) - requires a 'poetics of association' (Orr, 1993, p.79) that will take account of this broader aspect, and incorporate metatextual discourse in its investigative methodology.

Orr's emphasis on metatexts and paraliterary codes is one that follows both Bakhtin and Kristeva. In her essay 'Fiction, fact and madness: intertextual relations among Gide's female characters' Celia Britton argues that Bakhtin attributes the superiority of the novel over other genres to its capacity for incorporating and reflecting the diverse perspectives of multiple discourses:

[Bakhtin] argues that the novel differs radically from other genres in that it is never a single discourse, but a representation or 'image' of *other discourses*: 'all essentially novelistic images share this quality: they are internally dialogised images- of the languages, styles, world views of another (all of which are inseparable from their concrete linguistic and stylistic embodiment)' (Britton, 1990, p.169)

Bakhtin is concerned specifically with 'novelistic images' here; while Kristeva extends his theory regarding multiple discourses within texts to other genres, notably to poetry. The 'poetic word', according to Kristeva, is 'polyvalent and multi-determined'; it 'adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture' (Kristeva, 1986, p.36). Kristeva emphasises the correlation between text and culture, while Orr explores the dialectic nature of intertextuality in which texts enter into a relation not only with other works but also with 'the world(s) *outside* them' (Orr, 1993, p.80). Diana Knight uses an image of physical location in order to articulate her sense of literary receptivity: 'A writer...must have the persistence of the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses' (Knight, 1990, p.467).

If a writer is promiscuously receptive to all literary and non-literary discourses - and if theories of intertextuality must take account of this - then a critical study must apparently aim to be as broad as possible. This approach is particularly apposite in the case of Lawrence, who read and wrote so widely, his own literary works reflecting an active interest in (for example) philosophy; history; anthropology; Etrusc- and Egypt-ology; astrology and astronomy; religion; theosophy; and psychology. Before writing on a particular theme Lawrence always considered it necessary to read and acquire sufficient knowledge about his subject, even if he felt compelled later to reject scholarly opinion and either take up a radical view, or offer one of his own. My study will attempt to indicate the extent of Lawrence's 'paraliterary' scope, and to consider intertexts derived from many discourses. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is a historical and philosophical text - Burnet's book *Early Greek*



*Philosophy* - which (like the poetic intertexts I have already discussed) Lawrence read and re-read at various times throughout his life. His final re-reading of Burnet occurred in 1929, so the book is particularly interesting in relation to the poems that were being composed during the last two years of Lawrence's life. The Burnet text is appropriately plural/multiple, as it too provides an example of a text incorporating other texts: of fragments which have been collected and arranged into a whole. It is also multiple in that (in Lawrence's time) the book existed in three widely differing editions, and it is certain that Lawrence was familiar with at least two of these.

*Not reading the same text twice.*

Though this discourse is true evermore, yet men are as unable to understand it when they hear it for the first time as before they have heard it at all. For, although all things happen in accordance with the account I give, men seem as if they had no experience of them, when they make trial of words and works such as I set forth, dividing each thing according to its nature and explaining how it truly is. But other men know not what they are doing when you wake them up, just as they forget what they do when asleep. (Burnet, 1892, p.133)<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence discovered Heraclitus' philosophical fragments - as well as those of the other pre-Socratics - in Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*, which he read for the first time in 1915. He obtained the book from Bertrand Russell, who

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<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus, fr.2.

When quoting from Burnet I will normally derive the text from the 1892 edition, while also citing the third edition (1920) equivalent in a footnote if there are significant differences.

In the third edition this quotation reads:

Though this Word is true evermore, yet men are as unable to understand it when they hear it for the first time as before they have heard it at all. For, though all things come to pass in accordance with this Word, men seem as if they had no experience of them, when they make trial of words and deeds such as I set forth, dividing each thing according to its kind and showing how it truly is. But other men know not what they are doing when awake, even as they forget what they do in sleep. (Burnet, 1920, p.133)

lent him either the first edition (1892) or the second (1908) (see Pinto and Roberts, 1993, p.995). This book made such an impression on Lawrence that he felt compelled to revise his own philosophical writing in the light of his newfound insights:

I have been wrong, much too Christian, in my philosophy. These early Greeks have clarified my soul. (Lawrence, 1981, p.364) ...

I shall write all my philosophy again. Last time I came out of the Christian Camp. This time I must come out of these early Greek philosophers. (Lawrence, 1981, p.367)

Lawrence's philosophical essay 'The Crown', written in 1915, indeed proceeds from the standpoint of the early Greek philosophers, and of Heraclitus in particular. This essay reveals that Lawrence, unlike those who 'know not what they are doing when you wake them up' was able to respond initially to Heraclitus' philosophy with an 'act of attention'. Yet he was not content with an initial response, a single reading. Rather, Lawrence returned to the book regularly: he had a copy in America in 1922-3 and left it there; he bought a copy in London in 1926, and then had to ask for it again in 1929 (in a letter of 10 October), when engaged on the writing of his last book, *Apocalypse*:

Do you still have that book *Early Greek Philosophy* which I bought when I was last in London? if so, would you send it me, I want to do some work on the Apocalypse, and consult it. If you haven't got it, no matter. (Lawrence, 1993c, p.518) <sup>2</sup>

The depth of his engagement with the pre-Socratics after this re-reading is suggested by Mara Kalnins in her essay 'Symbolic Seeing: Lawrence and

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<sup>2</sup> In October 1929, Lawrence almost certainly read the third edition (1920). In my concluding chapter I will discuss the significance of these different editions in relation to the short prologues composed by Lawrence for inclusion in the Cresset Press (1930) edition of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.



Heraclitus'. After acknowledging the extent to which Lawrence's initial reading of Burnet in 1915 influenced his 'doctrine of duality' (Kalnins, 1986, p.173), Kalnins goes on to suggest that 'his interpretation of the ideas found there underwent a striking change in 1929, the final year of his life, a change which, significantly, was precipitated by his re-reading of Burnet and the work of Heraclitus and the pre-Socratics in that year' (Kalnins, 1986, p.173). In her introduction to *Apocalypse*, too, Kalnins emphasises the significance of this book in the 'shaping' of Lawrence's thoughts:

Burnet's philosophical study, therefore, was of the greatest importance in shaping Lawrence's thoughts about human nature and the cosmos.  
(Kalnins, 1995, p.16)

Kalnins' emphasis on the effect that Burnet had on *Apocalypse* is unsurprising when considering that Lawrence's re-reading occurred in 1929. It is likely that he returned to this key text with the intention of rediscovering crucial insights and incorporating them in *Apocalypse*, which was to constitute yet another re-writing of his philosophy. In 1929, after his re-reading, it seems that Lawrence was able to 'make trial' of the 'words and works...set forth' by Heraclitus, engaging intuitively with them and relating them to his own insights and experience. Literally and figuratively Lawrence avoided reading the same text twice: in 1929 (and probably 1926, as it is likely that this was the text sent to him three years later) he possessed the third edition rather than the earlier editions read in 1915 and (probably) 1922; while his reading of Burnet later in life, at a new stage in his thinking, meant that the text would have possessed a very different significance.

The pre-Socratic philosophers Anaximander, Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras and Pythagoras seem of particular relevance when considering the 'philosophy' articulated in *Last Poems*, and the way in which Burnet functioned as intertext. I will also refer to passages from *Apocalypse* (most of which was composed just after Lawrence had stopped writing poems into the two last

notebooks) in which crucial thoughts on these pre-Socratics are developed by Lawrence in prose.

*Anaximander's wheels.*

It is possible to acquire insight into Lawrence's engagement with the fragments incorporated in Burnet by considering the late poem 'Astronomical Changes' and Lawrence's other poems concerned with the 'wandering cosmos' in relation to the theories of Anaximander. In 'Astronomical Changes' Lawrence engages specifically with change that is occasioned by the movement of the heavens, explaining this change in terms of the zodiacal signs in which (for instance) the Pole departs, while the Pole Star 'lies aside':

The whole great heavens have shifted over, and slowly pushed aside  
the Cross, the Virgin, Pisces, the Sacred Fish  
that casts its sperm upon the waters, and knows no intercourse;  
pushed them all aside, discarded them, make way now for something else.

Even the Pole itself has departed now from the Pole Star  
and pivots on the invisible,  
while the Pole Star lies aside, like an old axle taken from the wheel.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.13; 1993a, p.616)

Astrologically the change here described is the process of human perception in which the heavenly bodies are seen to shift from Pisces into Aquarius. This change is also indicative of a religious shift from the era of Christianity signified by Pisces or 'Jesus of the watery way', to 'something else'. It is a movement beyond the Cross, Virgin and the wasted sperm of the Sacred Fish to a condition that the poem does not specify, but that might be imagined in terms of the poem 'Whales Weep Not!'. In this poem the 'wonder of whales' is linked by the bridging of the male and female bodies by the male's strong phallus; and the implicit coldness associated with the Sacred Fish finds its antithesis in the 'hot rainbow bliss' experienced in the procreative act. So the



astrological shift signifies the movement from a Christianity-orientated spiritualism to a pagan sense-consciousness (in Lawrence's terms) foregrounding physical experience.

In *Apocalypse* Lawrence associates the heavenly wheels specifically with paganism, and describes how this pagan association oddly appears in the Bible. In fact it appears in Ezekiel rather than in the Apocalypse itself, for 'In John of Patmos, the "wheels" are missing. They have been superseded long ago by the spheres of the heavens' (Lawrence, 1980, p.83). Describing Ezekiel's 'great vision',<sup>3</sup> Lawrence asks:

what is it but pagan, disfigured probably by jealous Jewish scribes: a great pagan concept of the Time Spirit and the Kosmokrator and the Kosmodynamos! Add to this that the Kosmokrator stands among the wheels of the heavens, known as the wheels of Anaximander, and we see where we are. We are in the great world of the pagan cosmos.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.82)

Lawrence elaborates on the 'wheel theory' of the heavens, describing its originator Anaximander as 'almost the very first of the ancient Greek thinkers, [who] is supposed to have invented this "wheel" theory of the heavens in Ionia in the sixth century B.C.' (Lawrence, 1980, p.83).

Anaximander's heavenly wheels are described in the following passage, quoted in Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*, in which Anaximander's theory is expounded by Hippolytos and Aetios:

The heavenly bodies are wheels of fire separated off from the fire which encircles the world, and surrounded by air. And they have breathing-holes, certain pipe-like openings through which the heavenly bodies are seen. ...

Anaximander said the stars were hoop-like compressions of air, full of fire, breathing out flames at a certain point from orifices. The sun was highest of all, after it came the moon, and below these the fixed stars and the planets.

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<sup>3</sup> See notes to 82:21 and 82:23 in Kalnins, 1980, p.211.

Anaximander said that the sun was a ring twenty-eight times the size of the earth, like a cart-wheel with the felloe hollow and full of fire, showing the fire at a certain point, as if through the nozzle of a pair of bellows. (Burnet, 1892, pp.69-70) <sup>4</sup>

This passage, as well as Anaxagoras' perception of the thunder and lightning causing 'a flash by contrast with the darkness of the cloud', obviously lies behind Lawrence's response to the wheel-conception of the heavenly bodies in *Apocalypse*:

Strange and fascinating are the great revolving wheels of the sky, made of dense air or night-cloud and filled with the blazing cosmic fire, which fire peeps through or blazes through at certain holes in the felloes of the wheels, and forms the blazing sun or the pointed stars. All the orbs are little holes in the black wheel which is full of fire: and there is wheel within wheel, revolving differently.  
(Lawrence, 1980, p.82)

It is interesting that when Lawrence considers the motion of the heavenly wheels he has to refer to their motion as 'complex' as well as 'orderly', and to accentuate this complexity by picturing many a sub-stratum of wheels: 'wheel within wheel, revolving differently'. He is probably adding a later understanding of revolving spheres here: one which enables him to avoid creating the visual impression of a wheel - or group of wheels - turning continually and unswervingly in an orderly, pre-determined rotation. In 'Astronomical Changes' it is exactly such an orderly rotation that the Pole manages to avoid. The Pole has departed from its fixed point or axle and now

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<sup>4</sup> In the third (1920) edition the equivalent passages read as follows:

The heavenly bodies are a wheel of fire, separated off from the fire of the world, and surrounded by air. And there are breathing-holes, certain pipe-like passages, at which the heavenly bodies show themselves...

The heavenly bodies were hoop-like compressions of air, full of fire, breathing out flames at a certain point through orifices...

The sun was a wheel 28 times the size of the earth, like a chariot-wheel with the felloe hollow, full of fire, showing the fire at a certain point through an orifice, as through the nozzle of a pair of bellows.

(Burnet, 1920, pp.66-7)



'pivots on the invisible': a movement that suggests a progression. The Pole Star (probably one of the stars that Lawrence envisaged as 'fixed') is left as merely the 'old axle taken from the wheel', the superseded emblem of a rigidity from which the Pole has been liberated.

In many of the *Last Poems* Anaximander's 'wheel theory' and the concept of 'wandering', liberated heavenly bodies are seen as irreconcilable:

Oh, do not tell me the heavens as well are a wheel.  
 For every revolution of the earth around the sun  
 is a footstep onwards, onwards, we know not whither  
 and we do not care,  
 but a step onwards in untravelled space,  
 for the earth, like the sun, is a wanderer.  
 Their going round each time is a step  
 onwards, we know not whither,  
 but onwards, onwards, for the heavens are wandering  
 the moon and the earth, the sun, Saturn and Betelgeuse, Vega and Sirius  
 and Altair  
 they wander their strange and different ways in heaven  
 past Venus and Uranus and the signs.<sup>5</sup>

(Lawrence, MS2, pp.20-1; 1993a, p.713)

Here the wandering of the heavenly bodies has the 'strange' fascination that in *Apocalypse* Lawrence attributes to the 'revolving wheels of the sky'. In this poem wheel-motion inevitably suggests rigidity, so the revolution of the earth round the sun must be seen as a step onwards, but a step that remains undefined and spontaneous, as the term 'wandering' suggests. It is thus that the heavens become representative of our entire existence, for 'life is a wandering, we know not whither, but going'; and the fixed wheel remains the antithesis of such a perception of life: 'Only the wheel goes round, but it never wanders. / It stays on its hub' (Lawrence, MS2, p.21; 1993a, p.713).

This wandering/wheel antithesis is one that is prevalent throughout *Last Poems*, functioning as a critique of modern man in his relation to the machine.

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<sup>5</sup> The last line here provides an example of Lawrence freely amalgamating astrology and astronomy.

In the poem 'Death is not Evil, Evil is Mechanical', the wheel-and-hub image becomes emblematic of a potential within human behaviour, rather than of the heavens:

Only the human being, absolved from kissing and strife  
goes on and on and on, without wandering  
fixed upon the hub of the ego  
going, yet never wandering, fixed, yet in motion,  
the kind of hell that is real, grey and awful  
sinless and stainless going round and round  
the kind of hell grey Dante never saw  
but of which he had a bit inside him.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.21; 1993a, pp.713-14)

The hub of the wheel becomes the hub of the ego, resulting in the paradoxical situation in which the human is in motion yet fixed and never 'wandering'.

Such fixity results from the human's refusal of the complexity and duality inherent in the mortal condition, in which one is (for example) 'a mixture of yea and nay', 'a rainbow of love and hate' and 'a wind that blows back and forth' (Lawrence, MS2, p.21; 1993a, p.714). Denial results in the wheel-condition that indicates a figurative metamorphosis into mechanisation or nullity:

And thou shalt begin to spin round on the hub of the obscene ego  
a grey void thing that goes without wandering  
a machine that in itself is nothing  
a centre of the evil world-soul.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.21; 1993a, pp.713-14)

The poem 'The Evil World-Soul' picks up on the association made in the last line and expands it into an entire poem. In this poem the wheel-machine is seen to possess a soul that is both individual and part of a larger evil, namely the 'evil world-soul':

Every wheel on its hub has a soul, evil,  
it is part of the evil world-soul, spinning.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.20; 1993a, p.713)



The world-soul in this poem is seen as a power 'which wishes to blaspheme the world into greyness, / into evil neutrality, into mechanism'. Similarly in the poem 'Departure' the 'evil will in many evil men' makes an evil world-soul, which purposes 'to reduce the world to grey ash' (Lawrence, MS2, p.22; 1993a, p.716). The evil world-soul envisaged here is dangerous as it is a force that is actively harmful, possessed of a will-to-destruction.

In *Last Poems*, then, the 'wheel' is associated with the evil world-soul or evil principle that prevents modern man from 'wandering' and changing. In the poem 'Old Men' the concept of 'fluidity' and 'living change' is shored against the robotic fixity resulting from the wheel-like state:

The gods, who are life, and the fluidity of living change  
leave the old ones fixed to their ugly, cogged self-will  
which turns on and on, the same, and is hell on earth.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.45; 1993a, p.662)

'Wandering' is one way of articulating living change; another is to see it in terms of flux or fluidity: a river-like flowing onwards in which there is no fixed path, and no possibility of repetition.

### *Heraclitus and living change.*

Lawrence's views on the duality and fluidity inherent in life were profoundly influenced by Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher to whom Lawrence apparently responded most enthusiastically. On his initial reading of Burnet, Lawrence had been impressed by Heraclitus to the extent that he vowed to 'write out Herakleitos, on tablets of bronze' (Lawrence, 1981, p.364). In this letter to Bertrand Russell, written on or around 14 July 1915, Lawrence offers a political alternative to Russell's socialism, involving the establishment of an 'aristocracy of people who have wisdom', governed by a 'Ruler' or 'Kaiser'. Lawrence casts Heraclitus in this role, perceiving him as a new

equivalent to the ancient religious prophet or seer like Moses. He then proceeds to write out parts of Heraclitus on paper, choosing fragments which reflect and support his anti-democratic campaign:

**'And it is law, too, to obey the counsel of one'.<sup>6</sup>**

‘For what thought or wisdom have they? They follow the poets and take the crowd as their teacher, knowing not that there are many bad and few good. For even the best of them choose one thing above all others, immortal glory among mortals: while most of them are glutted like beasts’.<sup>7</sup>

'They vainly purify themselves by defiling themselves with blood'.<sup>8</sup>

'If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it. For it is hard to [be] sought out, and difficult'.<sup>9</sup>

(Lawrence, 1981, pp.364-65)

In this letter Lawrence not only quotes Heraclitus directly, but also slips into the style of the fragments in order to articulate his own thoughts; which, like those of Heraclitus, chop and change between different preoccupations:

**Also we must unite together, not work apart.**

**I am rid of all my christian religiosity. It is only a muddiness.**

**You need not mistrust me. In fact you don't.**

**In a fortnight now I shall come to town.**

Murry, on the Sunday, was himself again...<sup>10</sup>

**It is only the unexpected can help us now.**

(Lawrence, 1981, pp.364-65)

Lawrence responds overtly to the inherent wisdom of Heraclitus' discourse; yet in adopting the style of these fragments he reveals that his intertextual response has been artistic as well as conceptual/ideological. He is not content simply to

<sup>6</sup> Heraclitus, fr.110, Burnet, 1892, p.140; Burnet, 1920, p.140.

<sup>7</sup> Heraclitus, fr.111, Burnet, 1892, p.141; Burnet, 1920, p.140.

<sup>8</sup> Heraclitus, fr.129,130, Burnet, 1892, p.142; Burnet, 1920, p.141.

<sup>9</sup> Heraclitus, fr.7, Burnet, 1892, p.134; Burnet, 1920, p.133.

<sup>10</sup> The line missed out here is the last of the previous quotation, beginning 'If you do not expect...'.  
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read, attempt to decipher and assimilate; he must engage at a deeper level in order to participate in the experience of this mode of writing.

It is not surprising that Lawrence was struck by these fragments, which have the appeal of the enigmatic Blakean aphorisms found, for instance in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'. The mysterious nature of the fragments is emphasised by Burnet:

The style of Herakleitos [sic.] is proverbially obscure, and got him the nickname of 'the Dark' in antiquity. He employs images without any indication of the point of comparison...  
(Burnet, 1892, p.131) <sup>11</sup>

Burnet refers to Heraclitus' use of irony, oxymoron and word-play as well as the oracular style which tends to lead to semantic confusion. He identifies the suggestion of a veiled meaning, perhaps because Heraclitus wanted to avoid accusations of impiety (Schuster's suggestion) or because he wanted to hide his views from the 'profane vulgar' (Teichmüller's). If this is the case, then the fragments may have appealed to Lawrence as texts requiring reading and articulating: a kind of unsealing in which visionary implications are discovered and revealed.

Burnet also gives an alternative explanation of the text's enigmatic quality:

The truth is simply that there was as yet no such thing as a clear scientific prose style. Herakleitos could not find any but metaphorical language in which to express the new thoughts which had taken possession of his mind. (Burnet, 1892, p.132) <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In the third edition the passage reads 'The style of Herakleitos is proverbially obscure, and, at a later date, got him the nickname of "the Dark"' (Burnet, 1920, p.132). The next sentence from the first edition is omitted.

<sup>12</sup> In the third edition Heraclitus' obscurity is attributed rather to a consciously adopted oracular style, and to a 'headstrong temperament' which 'sometimes led him into incompleteness and inconsistencies of statement' (Burnet, 1920, p.132).

It may be true that if Heraclitus 'does not go out of his way to make his meaning clear, neither does he hide it' (Burnet, 1892, p.132). The meaning or meanings may not be veiled, but the stylistic restraints imposed on the author and his refusal to engage in conscious clarification mean that the text requires active - perhaps creative and imaginative - interpretation. Heraclitus' appeal for Lawrence did not only lie in his obscurity, however, but in the implications of the 'words and works' set forth in his fragments: particularly those which relate to the cosmos and to the human consciousness. Heraclitus' conception of both cosmos and consciousness is reliant on the paradoxical belief that 'Oneness' arises from the co-existence of opposite tensions, while stability is the product not of stillness but of constant motion, or 'flux'. According to Heraclitus, the apparent stability of the cosmos arises from the simultaneously occurrent 'upward' and 'downward' paths, in which one element is constantly changing and becoming another. Earth takes the upward path, changing to water, to air and then to fire; while fire is simultaneously taking the 'downward path' and replenishing the supply of earth. Although the quantities of each element may vary slightly, the balance is not significantly disturbed, and no single element can exceed its measure. As long as the upward and downward paths remain in polarity, the elements are held within limits, and there will never be universal collapse.

Lawrence's idea of the 'fluidity of living change' (the alternative to robotic fixity) may thus originally have derived from the Heraclitean conception of the cosmos in flux. Heraclitus' emblem for the paradox of 'flux within stability' is an ever-flowing, ever-changing stream or river:

You cannot step twice into the same rivers; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.<sup>13</sup> (Burnet, 1892, p.136; 1920, p.136)

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<sup>13</sup> Heraclitus, fr.41;42.



Ostensibly a river is always in the same place, with little deviation except from a particular water-level. Yet it is constantly moving, flowing inexorably onwards: it appears to be changeless, yet it is perpetually changing. The river is paradoxically 'moving still': an oxymoron which Heraclitus applies not only to the *elemental* 'flux within stability', but also to the process of flux as it is embodied within humankind.<sup>14</sup> In flowing onwards while simultaneously 'wandering' (streamlets are said to wander or meander), the river might be said to adhere to the Heraclitean paradox expressed in fr.83 'It finds rest in change' (Burnet, 1892, p.139).<sup>15</sup> Rather like the shoal described in 'The Flying-Fish' in which the fish are constantly moving and changing position within an apparently unaltering outer shape, the water flowing between river-banks has ceaseless motion without the appearance of alteration, and is constantly self-replenishing.

In the poem 'False Democracy and Real', Lawrence uses the image of a running stream to designate those who remain distinct from the industrialised masses by looking - and flowing - towards 'the gods':

The few must look into the eyes of the gods...  
and the stream is towards the gods, not backwards, towards man.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.36; 1993a, p.650)

'The gods' here symbolise the 'marvellous rich world of contact and sheer fluid beauty' ('fluid' being a significant word) which can be attained when 'man has escaped from the barbed-wire entanglement / of his own ideas and his own

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<sup>14</sup> In his analysis of the Heraclitean fragments, Burnet quotes the 'obviously Heraclitean' sentence 'All things are passing, both human and divine, upwards and downwards by exchanges', and interprets it as follows:

We are just as much in perpetual flux as anything else in the world. We are and are not the same for two consecutive instants. The fire in us is perpetually becoming water, and the water earth; but, as the opposite process goes on simultaneously, we appear to remain the same.  
(Burnet, 1920, pp.151-52).

<sup>15</sup> In the third edition fr. 83 reads 'It finds rest by changing' (Burnet, 1920, p.139).

mechanical devices' (Lawrence, MS1, p.47; 1993a, p.667). Through awareness of the gods it is possible to experience 'a going outward into the worlds of *becoming*, of ceaseless change and transformation' (Pryse, 1910, p.13).

In the essay 'Poetry of the Present' Lawrence had associated the fluidity of 'becoming' with poetry that is alive, spontaneous and flexible in its capturing of the 'immediate present, the Now':

Here, in this very instant moment, up bubbles the stream of time, out of the wells of futurity, flowing on to the oceans of the past. The source, the issue, the creative quick. (Lawrence, 1936, p.219)

The virtue of poetry of the present is that it exists in creative flux; it ought to be transient and flexible rather than permanent and rigid. Lawrence wrote of the *Pansies* poetry collection: 'I offer a bunch of pansies, not a wreath of *immortelles*'; and warned his readers not to 'nail the pansy down. You won't keep it any better if you do' (Lawrence, 1992a, p.291). His late aphoristic poems, rather like the Heraclitean fragments as well as Pascal's *Pensées*, La Bruyère's *Caractères* and La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*<sup>16</sup> are brief, enigmatic and mutually contradictory in keeping with the unimpaired creative flowing or meandering of its author's creativity.

The poem 'Change' asserts the necessity of a passage through the 'waters of oblivion' before it is possible to become essentially 'different':

Do you think it is easy to change?  
Ah, it is very hard to change and be different.  
It means passing through the waters of oblivion.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.727)

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<sup>16</sup> The significance of these seventeenth century French texts is discussed by Christopher Pollnitz in a recently published pamphlet entitled 'D.H. Lawrence and the *Pensée*', Paris: Carrefour Alysamps Press, n.d. [1996].



Here, the waters clearly relate to the 'sea of change' described in the draft poem 'Ship of Death', and deriving from the mythological river Styx. In this poem it is necessary to be dipped into oblivion in order to emerge or be reincarnated, so that 'the whole thing starts again'. Similarly the poem 'Phoenix' asserts the necessity of being 'dipped' into oblivion (as Achilles is dipped in the Styx and left invulnerable except for the undipped ankle) before change can ensue:

Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled,  
made nothing?  
Are you willing to be made nothing?  
dipped into oblivion?

If not, you will never really change.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.31; 1993a, p.728)

Oblivion is again envisaged as the 'sea of change', which may be related to the Heraclitean river embodying the paradox of 'rest within change'.

The cyclical process of birth and death articulated in such poems as 'Phoenix' and 'Ship of Death' echoes that implied in another Heraclitean fragment:

Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the  
other's death and dying the other's life.<sup>17</sup> (Burnet, 1892, p.138)

One interpretation of this fragment would be to say that immortals 'live' the death of mortals through being aware of it, while mortals 'die' as a way of revealing the continuing lives of the immortals: the 'change' is therefore one arising from awareness of the opposite condition. Such key Heraclitean dualisms were crucial in informing, for example, the concept of change or

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<sup>17</sup> Heraclitus fr.67.

The third edition prints 'living the other's death and dying the other's life' as 'living the others' death and dying the others' life' (Burnet, 1920, p.138).

'changing phases' articulated in *Last Poems*. In 'Shadows' the 'changing phases of man's life' occasion 'snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of renewal'. Life's changing phases are seen to be determined by the cyclical or diurnal course of nature - earth's lapse and renewal - so that sickness oscillates with renewed health. This oscillation enables the narrator to be sent forth on a new morning, 'a new man'; while in 'The Ship of Death' the resurrected body emerges 'strange and lovely' as if it has experienced a Shakespearean sea-change into 'something rich and strange' (see p.83).

The lapse/renewal and sickness/health dichotomies are representative of the duality that Lawrence stresses in *Last Poems*: 'All existence is dual, and surging towards a consummation into being' (Lawrence, 1968, p.470). In his emphasis on duality (and on strife in particular) he follows Heraclitus, who taught that all creation is dual but emerges from a primary absolute: the 'Boundless'. Certainly Lawrence's emphasis on 'strife' as resulting from the creative conflict of contraries - evident for instance in 'The Crown' and in late poems such as 'Strife' - is one derived from the pre-Socratics, and from Heraclitus in particular, who considered strife to be the creative principle that separated out the primary substance. In the short prose prologue to the 'Reptiles' section of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, Lawrence quotes Heraclitus' fragment 'Homer was wrong in saying: "Would that strife might perish from among gods and men!" He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for, if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away' (Burnet, 1892, p.136; 1920, p.136).<sup>18</sup> (I will discuss Lawrence's quoting of Burnet in the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* prologues in my final chapter.) This fragment, and also the one in which Heraclitus states that 'It is opposition that brings things together' (Burnet, 1892, p.137)<sup>19</sup> link Heraclitus with

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<sup>18</sup> Heraclitus fr.43.

<sup>19</sup> Heraclitus fr.46.

In the third edition fragment 46 reads 'It is the opposite which is good for us' (Burnet, 1920, p.136).



Anaximander, Empedocles and Aristotle, who also realised the potentially positive or creative power of strife. Aristotle, for instance, asserts that 'while Strife is assumed as the cause of destruction, and does, in fact, destroy the Sphere, it really gives birth to everything else in so doing' (Burnet, 1892, p.246; 1920, p.233); while he says that Empedocles 'holds that the world is in a similar condition now in the period of Strife as formerly in that of Love' (Burnet, 1892, p.249; 1920, pp.234-35).

Anaximander applies the concepts of strife and opposition specifically to the elements:

Anaximander was struck, it would seem, by the opposition and strife between the things which go to make up the world; the warm fire was opposed to the cold air, the dry earth to the liquid sea.

(Burnet, 1892, p.51)<sup>20</sup>

Similarly Empedocles considers the way in which Strife brings about the birth of sun, earth, sky and sea, while enabling them to remain distinct as a 'mixture':

[The elements] differ as far as possible in their origin and mixture and the forms imprinted on each, being altogether unaccustomed to come together, and very hostile, under the influence of Strife, since it has wrought their birth. (Burnet, 1892, pp.226-27)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In the third edition this passage reads:

Anaximander started, it would seem, from the strife between the opposites which go to make up the world; the warm was opposed to the cold, the dry to the wet. (Burnet, 1920, pp.53-4)

<sup>21</sup> Empedocles, I.190-94.

In the third edition this passage is printed as part of fragment 22:

Those things, again, that differ most in origin, mixture and the forms imprinted on each, are most hostile, being altogether unaccustomed to unite and very sorry by the bidding of Strife, since it hath wrought their birth.

(Burnet, 1920, p.209)

The elements thus represent the opposition or balance in the cosmos that Lawrence had considered to be so significant since first reading Burnet in 1915; and which finally became the focus of his 'elemental' poems, for which the fragments of Empedocles in Burnet provide the key intertexts.

*Empedocles and the four roots.*

Lawrence's poem 'The Four' articulates his feeling regarding the nature and significance of the elements:

To my senses, the elements are four  
and have ever been, and will ever be  
for they are the elements of life, of poetry, and of perception  
the four Great Ones, the Four Roots, the First Four  
of Fire and the Wet, Earth and the wide Air of the world.

To find the other many elements, you must go to the laboratory  
and hunt them down.  
But the Four we have always with us, they are our world.  
Or rather, they have us with them.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.15; 1993a, p.706)

The elements can be apprehended by the 'senses' or by 'sense-consciousness', and their significance is emphasised by the reference to them as 'the elements of life, of poetry, and of perception'. They are shown to be able to dictate or order our lives, accepting or rejecting us: 'rather, they have us with them'. The reference to the four elements as the four 'Roots' is one directly derived from Empedocles:

The elements or 'roots of all things' which Empedokles [sic.] assumed were the four which have since become traditional, Fire, Air, Earth, and Water. (Burnet, 1892, p.240)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In the third edition this passage reads:

The 'four roots' of all things (fr. 6) which Empedocles assumed—Fire, Air, Earth, and Water—seem to have been arrived at by making each of the traditional 'opposites'—hot and cold, wet and dry—into a *thing* which is real in the full Parmenidean sense of the word. (Burnet, 1920, p.228)



According to Burnet, Empedocles was 'quite confident that his "four roots" were an exhaustive enumeration of the elements': a conviction that derives from 'his belief that they sufficiently accounted for all the qualities presented by the world to the senses; Fire accounted for light and heat, Water for darkness and cold, Earth for solidity and hardness' (Burnet, 1892, p.244).<sup>23</sup> Empedocles describes 'how, out of Water and Earth and Air and Fire mingled together, arose the colours and forms of all those mortal things that have been fitted together by Aphrodite' (Burnet, 1892, p.227; 1920, pp.215-16). The significance of the elements, as far as mankind is concerned, is emphasised by his assertion that 'by these [i.e. the elements] do men think and feel pleasure and pain' (Burnet, 1892, p.232; 1920, p.220).

Burnet quotes Aristotle's statement, made twice, that Empedocles treats his four elements in fact as only two, setting Fire in opposition to all the rest. As Burnet asserts, according to Empedocles' general theory of the elements this conclusion has no grounds whatsoever. Burnet assumes that Aristotle is merely referring to Empedocles' theory of the origin of the world, in which Fire plays a leading role as a source of motion as would be expected, for it does so in all early cosmologies (Burnet, 1892, p.244; c.f. 1920, p.231). It is Heraclitus, rather, who places the greatest emphasis on Fire, identifying it as a Primary substance and a measure of all things:

This order, which is the same in all things, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an everliving Fire, fixed measures of it kindling and fixed measures going out.

(Burnet, 1892, p.135)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This appears in condensed form in the third edition (Burnet, 1920, p.231).

<sup>24</sup> Heraclitus fr.20.

This fragment is altered in the third edition:

This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out. (Burnet, 1920, p.134)

He also asserts in fr.22 that 'All things are exchanged for Fire, and Fire for all things' (Burnet, 1892, p.135; 1920, p.135) and in fr.26 that 'Fire will come upon and lay hold of all things' (Burnet, 1892, p.135).<sup>25</sup>

The significance of fire in Lawrence's late poems is evident in 'Phoenix', in which fire lays hold of the Phoenix that is to be burnt alive; but the burning only results in re-emergence from the flames and renewal of the bird's youth:

The phoenix renews her youth  
only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down  
to hot and flocculent ash.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.31; 1993a, p.728)

In the poem 'Death' fire is necessary to soften the obstinate men and women who possess 'hardened souls' and resist death:

their hardened souls are washed with fire, and washed and seared  
till they are softened back to life-stuff again, against which they  
hardened themselves.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.45; 1993a, p.663)

As in 'Phoenix', continuation or rebirth is implied here, this time by the softening into 'life-stuff' that the fire occasions.

The phrase 'washed by fire' hints at a crucial duality that informs many of the 'elemental' *Last Poems*, a duality referred to sometimes as 'fire and the wet'. Water in these poems usually takes the form of salt-water - i.e. the sea - whose inexhaustibility is emphasised in the poem 'Kissing and Horrid Strife':

But still I know that life is for delight  
and for bliss  
as now when the tiny wavelets of the sea

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<sup>25</sup> In the third edition this fragment reads: 'Fire in its advance will judge and convict all things' (Burnet, 1920, p.135).



tip the morning light on edge, and spill it with delight  
to show how inexhaustible it is...

(Lawrence, MS2, p.17; 1993a, p.709)

The same inexhaustibility is evident in 'Mana of the Sea', and shown to be both more wonderful and more paradoxical. It is articulated interrogatively, the rhetoric inviting affirmation: 'Do you see the sea, breaking itself to bits against the islands / yet remaining unbroken, the level great sea?' (Lawrence, 1993a, p.705).

I have already shown how, in 'Mana of the Sea', a metamorphosis is described which enables the human being to be seen differently, and realised for what s/he potentially is:

And is my body ocean, ocean  
whose power runs to the shores along my arms  
and breaks in the foamy hands, whose power rolls out  
to the white-treading waves of two salt feet?

I am the sea, I am the sea!

(Lawrence, MS2, p.15; 1993a, p.705)

I have considered Swinburnian intertexts which serve as contexts for Lawrence's writing here. The literal metamorphosis depicted is also explicable through reference to the pre-Socratic relationship between man and nature. In *Apocalypse* Lawrence writes very similarly: 'I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea' (Lawrence, 1980, p.149). Lawrence uses the 'elemental' nature of those who are 'part' of the natural world as one pole in a crucial dichotomy, the other pole being the modern men 'who don't hear the sea's uneasiness!'. The crucial point is the failure of modern man to be attuned to the sea, to hear its rhythms and its voice, and if they fail to do that, in its turn the sea (like the rest of the planet) becomes threatening; 'uneasy'.

In his challenging and fragmentary writing, Lawrence offers the perspective that men who are vivid and truly living are those who are in tune with the voice of the elements, and thus are able to embody the duality or opposition that provides the necessary contraries in life:

Oh men, living men, vivid men, ocean and fire  
don't give any more life to the machines!  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.29; 1993a, p.639)

The ocean/fire dichotomy, and the potential for co-existence of these elements within a cosmic balance, is significant. The poem 'Whales Weep Not!' offers a perception of the sea's depths in which the heat of procreation is seen to engender a living potency. I have already mentioned how this image of a hot and fertile ocean provides an antithesis to the coldness of the sea emphasised in the poem 'Fish', in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. The sea of 'Whales Weep Not!' is pagan and restless:

They say the sea is cold, but the sea contains  
the hottest blood of all, and the wildest, the most urgent. ...

And they rock, and they rock, through the sensual ageless ages ...  
and in the tropics tremble they with love  
and roll with massive, strong desire, like gods.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.6; 1993a, p.694)

This sea possesses the qualities simultaneously of Heraclitean water and of fire, and it is within this balance, duality or opposition that procreation or the Blakean progression beyond contraries can occur.

The actual residue of the opposition between fire and sea is 'salt', as expressed by Lawrence in the poem with this title:

Salt is scorched water that the sun has scorched  
into substance and flaky whiteness  
in the eternal opposition



between the two great ones, Fire, and the Wet.<sup>26</sup>  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.15; 1993a, p.705)

In 'The Boundary Stone' this product of opposition - and its significance - is further contemplated. Salt is 'the boundary mark between Fire that burns, and the Wet', also referred to as a 'white stone of limits' and a 'landmark'. Fire and the Wet become 'the two great and moving ones', and are related to the 'blood and sweat' that are marked out according to the 'boundary' of salt. Empedocles, between a reference to 'The sea with its silly tribe of fertile fish' (a conception rather different from Lawrence's, but one which Lawrence arguably engages with and alters) and to 'Sea, the sweat of the earth' sandwiches the aphorism 'Salt was solidified by the impact of the sun's beams' (Burnet, 1892, p.226).<sup>27</sup> Empedocles proceeds then to give an account of a situation in which Strife retired to the 'extreme boundary' when Love was situated at 'the centre of the whirl'. In Lawrence's poetry, salt begins as a boundary or 'limit' - the synthesis that keeps the thesis and antithesis of Fire and the Wet in appropriate balance - but it assumes another significance in Lawrence's poem 'Spilling the Salt'. Salt becomes associated with the 'sunderers' or 'watchers, the dividers, those swift ones with dark sharp wings' who are antithetical to the benevolent 'angels of creation'. Here the salt has the role of counteracting a superfluity of good, and preserving a necessary balance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In *The Rainbow*, roughly contemporaneous with Lawrence's first reading of Burnet, salt is described as follows: 'The salt, bitter passion of the sea, its indifference to the earth, its swinging, definite motion, its strength, its attack, and its salt burning, seemed to provoke [Ursula] to a pitch of madness, tantalising her with vague suggestions of fulfilment' (Lawrence, 1989a, p.443).

<sup>27</sup> In the third edition of Burnet fragment 74, 'Leading the songless tribe of fertile fish' (Burnet, 1920, p.216), is separated from its surrounding fragments, which are printed earlier as fr.55 and 56, p.214.

<sup>28</sup> The association of salt with the 'sunderers'/'angels of creation' dichotomy hints at a Biblical context, and it does seem that the pre-Socratics provide terms of reference for allusions to the elements that Dr. John Oman and James Pryce (as well as Lawrence)

It becomes clear that Lawrence is engaging with the pre-Socratic categories and vocabulary, but exploring and redefining their terms and concepts according to the development of his own poetry. Empedocles' elements, for instance, are not only considered in such poems as 'The Four', but also provide Lawrence with a way of characterising privileged human beings, who are seen as literally 'elemental'. The elemental 'few' are described as 'men of the wind and rain / men of the fire and rock' (Lawrence, MS1, p.28; 1993a, p.637). According to Lawrence in 'The Cross', it is necessary to 'serve that which is flamey or pure and watery or / swift wind or sound ringing rock / that which is elemental and of the substantial gods in man'. It is the elements, here, that enable the Lawrentian gods of *Last Poems* momentarily to take substance.

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identify in Revelation. For example, Oman refers to the 'living creatures' who pour out the vials of wrath over the earth as representing the four elements, thus showing 'that these judgments are to take place by what we would call natural causes':

The living creatures are the heavenly representatives of the four elements of nature—as appears from the vials being poured out on the earth, the water, the sun as fire, and the air. (Oman, 1923, p.124)

Elaborating on this interpretation, Oman writes:

The ox plainly stands for the earth he tills, and an eagle for the air in which he flies. The lion for fire which devours is also possible; and water with John is the symbol of fruitfulness and the likeness of man of God's way of working good; and, though less in accord with John's way of thinking, there is the description of a man 'as unstable as water'.

(Oman, 1923, pp.164-65)

Oman hints at the end of this passage at a conception of mankind explained by reference to elemental characteristics. This correspondence is also emphasised by Pryse, who uses the elements to account for the nature of man's mystical 'three bodies':

In mystical writings [man's three bodies, spiritual, psychic and physical] are made to correspond to the four occult elements, and also to the sun, moon, and earth, and hence are given the names air-body, water-body, fire-body, lunar body, and solar body (Pryse, 1910, p.11).



*Anaxagoras and Pythagoras; a return of returns.*

Lawrence used the pre-Socratics as source material; as stimulus and provocation to think outside the categories of later Greek, Roman and Christian civilisations. The diverse fragments and commentaries collected in Burnet frequently offer conflicting ideas and interpretations; and Lawrence makes no attempt to argue for one against the other, or to establish some kind of synthesis. Rather he takes 'hints' from the various philosophers, using them as textual springboards for his own imagination, sometimes accepting and sometimes rejecting them.

An example of profound disagreement with a notable pre-Socratic figure is evident in the poem 'Anaxagoras'. This poem engages with Anaxagoras' belief that 'all things will be in everything; nor is it possible for them to be apart, but all things have a portion of everything' (Burnet, 1892, p.285; 1920, p.259).<sup>29</sup> For Lawrence, claiming that he is 'part of the sun' and that his 'blood is part of the sea', this fragment might have proved useful, yet he chooses to dispute and reject it. Lawrence engages specifically with the following example provided by Burnet: 'Even snow, Anaxagoras affirmed, was black; that is, even the white contains a certain portion of the opposite quality' (Burnet, 1892, p.288, 1920, p.264). Lawrence's objection to this lies in the fact that the natural phenomenon - snow - has become (as he says in his 'Whitman' essay) 'Dead mentalized' (Lawrence, 1971, p.173):<sup>30</sup>

When Anaxagoras says: Even snow is black!  
he is taken by the scientists very seriously  
because he is enunciating a 'principle', a 'law'  
that all things are mind, and therefore the purest white snow

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<sup>29</sup> Anaxagoras fr.6.

<sup>30</sup> The same terminology is used in an exchange between Ursula, Hermione and Birkin: see Lawrence, 1987a, pp.40-5.

has in it an element of blackness.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.17; 1993a, p.708)

The poem continues with Lawrence's critique of the 'scientific', mental conception of snow, reached by abstract theorising rather than through sensory perception:

I call it mental conceit and mystification  
and nonsense, for pure snow is white to us  
white and white and only white  
with a lovely bloom of whiteness upon white  
in which the soul delights and the senses  
have an experience of bliss.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.17; 1993a, p.708)

According to Lawrence it is the response of the senses or sense-consciousness that is important, as this entails a sensitivity to the beauty and wonder of nature: a state referred to in *Apocalypse* as an awareness of the 'vast marvel of being alive'.

It is not that Lawrence is formulating his own dogmatic principle, asserting against all-comers that snow is always and inevitably white, for he goes on to say:

And in the shadow of the sun the snow is blue, so blue-aloof  
with a hint if the frozen bells of the scylla flower  
but never the ghost of a glimpse of Anaxagoras' funeral black.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.17; 1993a, p.708)

The blueness of snow perceived here is again a direct result of sensory perception: this is perhaps offered as an appropriate response to the natural world for it is poetic and imaginative rather than dogmatic or scientific. The perception results in the description of the snow as 'blue-aloof' so that the colour is seen reflecting the way in which it is alien to human beings, aloof from their concerns; and it *is* blue, in its depths, to the senses. The 'funeral black' of



Anaxagoras is absent entirely from this sensory response. It is described as 'funeral' not only because black is linked to funerals; but also because the scientific laws or principles showing that snow is - in part - black are the death of sense-consciousness, and therefore the death of man's actual relationship with the cosmos.

However, it would be wrong to generalise from this poem and assume that Lawrence was at this time in rebellion against 'science' and 'laws' *per se*. Such a generalisation could easily be countered through reference to *Apocalypse* and in particular the fragment 'Apocalypsis II', in which Lawrence discusses the 'science' of Pythagorean numbering at great length, and with evident fascination. I will give a brief account of Lawrence's engagement with Pythagoras as articulated in his prose, before discussing the way in which numbering intertextually informs *Last Poems*, focusing on the poem 'Return of Returns'.

In the fragment 'Apocalypsis II' (written after *Last Poems*)<sup>31</sup> Lawrence engages with the issue of Mind and the question of whether 'laws' can be said to govern the universe. In this instance he interrogates the concept of laws in relation to Pythagorean numbering: in relation, for instance, to the statement that 4 pebbles multiplied by 4 pebbles is 16. Trying to ascertain whether the reality of the conclusion lies in the mathematical 'laws' operative or in the fact of the pebbles themselves, he elicits the following generalisation:

The 'laws' don't 'govern' the universe. The 'laws' of the universe are only the more subtle properties of 'things'.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.197)

Even if the laws do not govern the universe, however, Lawrence is driven to respond to the question 'Which "rules", the law, or the substantial object?' with 'The answer is, of course, that neither rules' (Lawrence, 1980, p.197). From this it becomes evident that Lawrence's quarrel with Anaxagoras might give a

false impression of his views regarding the 'scientific', and its principles and laws. Lawrence's fascination with Pythagoras reveals another response to the scientific and more specifically mathematical conception of the universe, which he argues in *Apocalypse* is by no means at odds with an imaginative perspective.

Lawrence's acknowledgement of the significance of science is revealed in his assertions, in *Apocalypse*, that 'early science is a source of the purest and oldest religion' (Lawrence, 1980, p.131); and 'The first scientists...are very near to the old symbolists' (Lawrence, 1980, p.135). He argues that scientists can achieve an analogous state of 'supreme religious consciousness' to that of a symbolist, but by a different route:

Both ways end in the same place, the absolute somewhere or the absolute nowhere. But the method of approach is different. There is the method of association and unison, and the method of contrast and distinction.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.193)

Mathematical investigation need not be divorced either from the senses or from that which is 'elemental', for according to Aristotle 'mathematical numbers' were 'not "separated from the objects of sense"' (Burnet, 1892, p.308).<sup>32</sup> Again, according to Aristotle 'the Pythagoreans held that the elements of number were the elements of things, and, therefore, that things were numbers' (Burnet, 1892, p.307).<sup>33</sup> Numbers were not, for the Pythagoreans, merely abstractions, and they held a fascination for Lawrence that compelled him to pause between discussing the first and second halves of Revelation in order to

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<sup>31</sup> 'Apocalypsis II' is included by Mara Kalnins in an Appendix to *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation* (Kalnins, 1980).

<sup>32</sup> In the third edition Burnet paraphrases Aristotle, replacing 'objects of sense' with 'things of sense' (Burnet, 1920, p.287).

<sup>33</sup> The third edition equivalent is almost identical: see Burnet, 1920, p.286).



devote sections XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX and XXI of *Apocalypse* to a discussion of numbers. The fragment 'Apocalypsis II' is also dominated by this theme.<sup>34</sup>

Kalnins emphasises Lawrence's attraction to 'Pythagoras' mathematical triangle of ten, the tetraktys [sic.] of the dekad'. She highlights the Jungian significance of this symbol as a 'mandala' or 'emblem standing for the wholeness and integration of the self' (Kalnins, 1995, p.22). Numbers, in this conception, are seen as 'an aspect of the physically real as well as of the psychically imaginary' and are 'vehicles for psychic processes in the unconscious' (Kalnins, 1995, p.22). Dean Inge<sup>35</sup> describes the tetractys and its significance for the Pythagoreans:

[It was] a symbol consisting of a pyramid of ten units, tapering to its apex from a base of four. This symbol, they held, contained the 'fountain and root of ever-springing nature.' It was a picture of the processional movement...of life, out of unity into plurality. The tetractys was a figure both of the Orphic 'cycle of birth,'...and of the 'processional' movement just mentioned. (Inge, 1941, p.85)

In Inge's account the symbol is interesting in its signification both of a cyclic and a processional movement: in this it resembles the planets conceived by Lawrence in terms of Anaximander's wheels, yet able to wander and take steps onward.

The propensity of Pythagorean numbers to remain physical rather than (or as well as) abstract or mental is emphasised by Burnet's references to the pebbles which were essential to the initial counting systems employed by the Pythagoreans. Burnet refers to Aristotle's description of the methodology employed by the Pythagorean Eurtos (disciple of Philalaos):

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<sup>34</sup> Lawrence's late interest in mathematics and numbering may be related back to the maths prize awarded to him at Nottingham High School, and to the young Tom Brangwen's aptitude for this particular subject.

<sup>35</sup> In his *Lectures on Plotinus*, read by Lawrence in 1929-30.

In order to find the number of anything he used to set pebbles side by side in the shape of the thing and then count them. This was simply a graphic way of showing how many dimensions a thing had, taking a single pebble as one dimension. (Burnet, 1892, p.314)<sup>36</sup>

In *Apocalypse* Lawrence stresses the significance of the pebble-counting, which shows how 'the ancients saw number concrete', the number three (for instance) being three pebbles. The physicality of the pebbles (as opposed to the insubstantial number '3') is instrumental in revealing the symbolic aspect of the number in question. The integrity of the number three, for example, can be observed in a row of three pebbles, in which 'the central stone [is] poised and in perfect balance between the two, like the body of a bird between the two wings'. Lawrence goes on to observe that 'even as late as the third century, this was felt as the perfect or divine condition of being' (Lawrence, 1980, p.130).

Lawrence felt compelled to find out what number symbolism meant to the ancient mind as a result (perhaps) of observing that the whole scheme of the *Apocalypse* is 'entirely based on the numbers seven, four and three' (Lawrence, 1980, p.130).<sup>37</sup> He finds that 'Three is the number of things divine, and four is the number of creation' (Lawrence, 1980, p.133); while 'The numbers four and three together make up the sacred number seven: the cosmos with its god. The Pythagoreans called it "the number of the right time"' (Lawrence, 1980, p.136). Yet he asserts that the number seven has always, 'from the beginning', been semi-sacred 'because it is the number of the seven ancient planets, which began with sun and moon, and included the five great "wandering" stars: Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Mars and Saturn' (Lawrence, 1980, p.136). Thus the number has a resonance that pre-dates its Apocalyptic use and derives from the star-lore or star-cult that underlies much of the symbolism in *Revelation*.

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<sup>36</sup> In the third edition Burnet says of Eurytos 'he used to give the numbers of all sorts of things, such as horses and men, and that he demonstrated these by arranging pebbles in a certain way' (Burnet, 1920, p.100).

<sup>37</sup> This belief presumably derives from one of Lawrence's many apocalyptic sources.



In *Apocalypse* Lawrence emphasises the astral significance of the number seven:

Fate, fortune, destiny, character, everything depended on the stars, which meant, on the seven planets. The seven planets were the seven Rulers of the heavens, and they fixed the fate of man irrevocably, inevitably. (Lawrence, 1980, p.137)

The significance of the number seven is one that Burnet is keen to assert in his chapter on the Pythagoreans, although he emphasises the capricious or superstitious nature of the process by which a particular number was supposed to acquire significance through diverse associations:

Opportunity was identified with the number Seven on various fanciful grounds derived from the importance of that number in human life. The second teeth come at the seventh year, puberty at the fourteenth, the beard at the twenty-first. Besides, as Aristotle ironically adds, there are seven vowels, seven strings in the lyre, seven Pleiads, and Seven against Thebes! (Burnet, 1892, p.316)<sup>38</sup>

Lawrence might have identified such associations as part of the unfortunate process - described in *Apocalypse* - by which a genuine symbol, with its powerful astrological import, can degenerate into a status of superstition, and thus forfeit its potency.

According to Lawrence, parts of the Biblical Apocalypse are infused with the ancient meaning and significance afforded symbolically to specific numbers; while in other parts the number-symbolism has become merely superficial or superstitious. Lawrence identifies a process of degradation within Revelation, in which the number seven progressively loses its 'divine' implications:

the number seven ceases almost to be the 'divine' number, and becomes the magical number of the Apocalypse. As the book

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<sup>38</sup> There appears to be no equivalent to this passage in the third edition.

proceeds, the ancient divine element fades out and the 'modern', first-century taint of magic, prognostication, and occult practice takes its place. Seven is the number now of divination and conjuring, rather than of real vision. (Lawrence, 1980, p.137)

This degradation is analogous to the process by which (according to Lawrence) the Etruscan tombs he visited in 1927 had lost their profundity and pagan resonance as time progressed, their designs becoming stylised with the onset of Greek artistry and the conquering of the Etruscan people by the Romans. (The Etruscan links with Lawrence's late writings will be the focus of Chapter 6.)

In the poem 'Return of Returns' Lawrence (prior to writing *Apocalypse*) has articulated the need to be sharply aware of an ancient astrological culture in which seven has its original divine significance:

Come in a week  
Yes, yes, in the seven-day week!  
for how can I count in your three times three  
of the sea-blown week of nine.

Come then, as I say, in a week,  
when the planets have given seven nods  
'It shall be! It shall be!' assented seven times  
by the great seven, by Helios the brightest  
and by Artemis the whitest  
by Hermes and Aphrodite, flashing white glittering words,  
by Ares and Kronos and Zeus,  
the seven great ones, who must all say yes.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.13; 1993a, p.702) <sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Pryse interestingly interprets the apocalyptic 'Logos figure' who appears among lampstands holding seven stars (I.12-16) almost exactly according to the planetary scheme offered in 'Return of Returns' (the only difference being his reference to Selene rather than Artemis):

The Logos-figure described is a composite picture of the seven sacred planets: he has the snowy-white hair of Kronos ('Father Time'), the blazing eyes of 'wide-seeing' Zeus, the sword of Ares, the shining face of Helios, and the *chiton* and girdle of Aphrodite; his feet are of mercury, the metal sacred to Hermes, and his voice is like the murmur of the ocean's waves (the 'many waters'), alluding to Selene, the Moon-Goddess of the four seasons and of the waters. (Pryse, 1910, 89-90)



The poem is illuminated with reference to a passage in *Apocalypse*, in which Lawrence refers to the 'famous "time, times and a half"' (meaning three-and-a-half years) which 'is supposed to represent the half of a sacred week—all that is ever allowed to the princes of evil, who are never given the full run of the sacred week of seven "days"'. This, however, is a corruption of the ancient implications of the sacred week of seven days as it is infected by the 'semi-occult business' of prophesying the fall of empires' (Lawrence, 1980, pp.137-38). Lawrence in the poem imagines a return to the sacred week of the 'old days', untainted by occultism and superstition. The above passage from *Apocalypse* proceeds by asserting that in spite of the superstition that has cheapened the ancient potency of symbols it is still possible to maintain contact with the 'old days' in which 'the moon was a great power in heaven, ruling men's bodies and swaying the flux of the flesh' and 'seven was one of the moon's quarters'. For the moon 'still sways the flux of the flesh, and still we have a seven-day week'.<sup>40</sup>

The impossibility of counting according to a 'sea-blown week of nine' results from the fact that 'The Greeks of the sea had a nine-day week. That is gone' (Lawrence, 1980, p.138). We cannot recapture the period in which the week was made up of three-times-three, as is emphasised by a passage from Gilbert Murray's *Five Stages of Greek Religion*:<sup>41</sup>

Even the way of reckoning time changed under the influence of the Planets. Instead of the old division of the month into three periods of nine days, we find gradually establishing itself the week of seven days

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Thus Pryce, with his assumption that star-lore lies behind the most crucial figures and symbols of Revelation, is one source underlying Lawrence's interpretation of Apocalyptic symbolism.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase 'flux of the flesh' may suggest menstruation, the term 'flux' implying 'flow'.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence initially read the earlier version of this book - *The Four Stages of Greek Religion*, published in 1912 - in 1916, and I will explore the significance of this intertext at greater length in my next chapter (see Lawrence, 1981, pp.556;558).

with each day named after its planet, Sun, Moon, Ares, Hermes, Zeus, Aphrodite, Kronos...It was the old week of Babylon, the original home of astronomy and planet-worship.

(Murray, 1925, pp.175-76)

'Return of Returns' implies, however, that it is fortunate that the nine-day week cannot be re-established, for its demise allows man to exist according to the astrological seven-day week, in which the planets are animate and can give active assent to our attempt at return.

In the last stanza of 'Return of Returns' the seven-day week is further described as 'The ancient river week, the old one'. In *Apocalypse* Lawrence relates how the beginning of our era coincided with the 'dying of the old era of the true pagans' (Lawrence, 1980, p.90), a death which occurred - according to him - around 1000 B.C. He refers to the 'great and ancient civilisation of the older world', the 'great river civilisations of the Euphrates, the Nile and the Indus, with the lesser sea-civilisation of the Aegean'. He proceeds:

It is puerile to deny the age and the greatness of the three river civilisations, with their intermediary cultures in Persia or Iran, and in the Aegean, Crete or Mycene. (Lawrence, 1980, p.90)

The river-week thus implies a reaching back even before the sea-civilisation of the Aegean celebrated in poems such as 'The Greeks are Coming!' and it also inevitably carries the Heraclitean 'Wet' implications of flux, inexhaustibility and conscious replenishment.

The reaching back is articulated by Lawrence in the aptly-titled 'Return of Returns': a poem which might also be seen as a paradigm for intertextual return. This poem, along with those I have discussed earlier in this chapter (as well as the relevant passages from *Apocalypse*), suggest that Lawrence's re-reading of Burnet in 1929 enabled him to re-interpret and re-contextualise the philosophical fragments to which he had responded so favourably in 1915: his re-reading was therefore a conscious return yet also a movement or step



onwards. It is appropriate, too, that Lawrence was employing new poetic forms - including a fragmentary 'pensée' style emulating the Heraclitean fragments as well as the seventeenth century French intertexts mentioned previously - when articulating the kind of philosophy that the Burnet fragments represent, considered by Lawrence to have contemporary relevance and significance.

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## Chapter 5 Back to the Roots: A Hierarchy of Intertexts

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### *Another kind of return: Tylor's Primitive Culture.*

The poem 'Return of Returns' is merely one exemplification of the way in which, in 1929, Lawrence imaginatively dissolves the boundary separating past from present and future. In *Apocalypse* he asserts that modern society might regain its integrity through a conscious return or reversion to an older culture or civilisation, stating that 'there are two modes of reversion: by degeneration and decadence; and by deliberate return in order to get back to the roots again, for a new start' (Lawrence, 1980, p.137). Lawrence's terminology here engages specifically with that of Edward B. Tylor, whose book *Primitive Culture* he had first read in 1916, and which explores both the 'progression theory' and the 'degeneration' or 'degradation' theories, which have been employed variously by commentators to account for the changes in civilisation from primitive or savage to modern times. Tylor subscribes predominantly to the progression theory, which charts a continual progressive development throughout history from savagery to civilisation; although his sense of 'progress' is made to incorporate brief lapses in which degeneration prevents the positive onward flow. Such 'degeneration and decadence' through undesired lapsing is the 'mode' of reversion or regression to past cultures which Lawrence clearly felt unhappy with, and which compels him to offer an alternative mode of 'deliberate return'. However, his assumption that there *are* roots to which one can return is itself an indication that he disagreed with Tylor fundamentally, and with all advocates of the progression theory. For this theory embodies an implicit recognition that primitivism is a state of ignorance beyond which it is necessary to progress; while Lawrence demanded instead a redefinition of such terms and concepts as primitivism and savagery, in order



that the past and our 'roots' in it be adequately understood. Lawrence was profoundly dissatisfied with the 'progress' of his contemporary society in the late twenties (as he had been earlier in life), and was constantly alive to the possibilities of alternatives. This is evident not just in his travels, but in numerous late texts: in his writings on the Etruscans (as before on the North American Indians), and notably in 'The Escaped Cock', 'A Dream of Life' and in *Apocalypse*, as well as in *Last Poems*. He advocates a deliberate return to the 'roots', a return which would undermine Tylor's framework indicating the inevitable progression and amelioration of society through time.<sup>1</sup> The resulting struggle to identify and reach these roots underlies the anthropological/mythological aspect of the 1928-30 poems, and drives Lawrence's shifting, deferring, fluctuating conceptualising of 'god' or 'God'.

Contextualisation is necessary in order to understand Lawrence's enthusiastic response to Tylor's book when he first encountered it. Significantly, when Lawrence was reading Tylor back in 1916, he was in violent recoil against the evils of modern society, politics and the masses, and formulated a possible escape-route via forgetfulness:

When I think of art, and then of the British public – or the French public, or the Russian – then a sort of madness comes over me, really as if one were fastened within a mob, and in danger of being trampled to death. I hate the 'public', the 'people', 'society', so much, that a madness possesses me when I think of them. I hate democracy so much. It almost kills me. But then, I think that 'aristocracy' is just as pernicious, only it is much more dead. They are both evil. But there is nothing else, because everybody is either 'the people' or 'the Capitalist'.

One must forget, only forget, turn one's eyes from the world: that is all. One must live...quite apart, forgetting, having another world, a world as yet uncreated. Everything lies in *being*, although the whole world is one colossal madness, falsity, a stupendous assertion of not-being.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of Lawrence, Darwin and Spengler's 'stress on rootedness and Destiny', exemplified in the Aztec myth (posited by Lawrence as an alternative to Darwinism) see Fernihough, 1993, pp.25;70;173-80. Also see the passage excised from *The Rainbow*, Lawrence, 1989a, pp.655-56 (printed in the Textual Apparatus).

Murry will read Tylor's *Primitive Culture* before I return it.  
It is a very good sound substantial book, I had far rather read it than  
*The Golden Bough* or Gilbert Murray. (Lawrence, 1981, p.593)

It may be inferred from this passage that Lawrence's initial reading of Tylor coincided with a period of discontent, and with the desire to redress this discontent through finding an alternative source of integrity and satisfaction. The world he advocates is 'not yet created' in the present, yet perhaps it *has* existed and can exist again. Certainly Tylor's book must have been provocative in providing a contrast between modernity and primitivism, and exploring the progression or degeneration that led from one to the other.

It is interesting that Lawrence expresses a preference for Tylor over Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (first read in 1915) and Murray (Lawrence first read *The Four Stages of Greek Religion* in 1916 <sup>2</sup>), and that he establishes a hierarchy of intertexts in which *Primitive Culture* is pre-eminent, as it is 'sound and substantial'. It might seem paradoxical that Lawrence preferred such soundness to the more ingeniously interpretative and subjective method of Frazer, yet it may be this rather dryly informative idiom that gave Lawrence the greatest scope for his own imaginative response. Frazer tends to yoke disparate cultures and mythologies together and bring them into distinct proximity, drawing parallels across racial, cultural and ideological boundaries rather in the way that Lawrence was to do in his late poems (such as 'All Sorts of Gods', which I will discuss later) - making the imaginative or at least conjectural leaps himself. Frazer's approach (as he himself explains), in contradistinction to the 'soundness' of Tylor, draws on

evidence...from a variety of scattered and often ambiguous indications:  
it is fragmentary, it is uncertain, and the conclusions built upon it  
inevitably partake of the weakness of the foundation. Where the  
records are so imperfect, as they happen to be in this branch of our

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence expressed his initial reaction to Murray's book as follows: 'I liked it. But I wish he were a little less popular and conversational in his style, and that he hadn't so many layers of flannel between him and his own nakedness. But the stuff of the book interests me enormously (Lawrence, 1981, pp.558-59).



subject, the element of hypothesis must enter largely into any attempt to piece together and interpret the disjointed facts. How far the interpretations here proposed are sound, I leave it to future inquiries to determine. (Frazer, 1927, p.223)

Soundness and substantiality (in so far as it is possible to achieve them, in this field of enquiry) are in many ways more appealing than the approach of a writer who feels he has to 'grope [his] way with small help from the lamp of history' (Frazer, 1927, p.223), especially when Lawrence is himself an interpreter rather than a scientific investigator. Tylor is as wide-ranging as Frazer (Murray is concerned solely with *Greek* religion), while also being 'scientific' rather than conjectural and judgmental; he elicits general principles from the 'correspondence of evidence' acquired through extensive cross-cultural research.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that Lawrence's intertextual hierarchy, suggested in a single letter, is either unchanging or in any way trustworthy. As I have argued previously, he often responds with a surge of enthusiasm to a recently-acquired text, gives that enthusiasm spontaneous expression, and in the process relegates other texts to an inferior status. In order to redress the balance, it is necessary, for instance, to consider Lawrence's initial reaction to Frazer as expressed in a letter to Bertrand Russell of December 1915:

I have been reading Frazer's *Golden Bough* and *Totemism and Exogamy*. Now I am convinced of what I believed when I was about twenty - that there is another seat of consciousness than the brain and the nerve-system: there is a blood-consciousness which exists in us independently of the ordinary mental consciousness, which depends on the eye as its source as connector. ...All living things, even plants, have a blood-being. If a lizard falls on the breast of a pregnant woman, then the blood-being of the lizard passes with a shock into the blood-being of the woman, and is transferred to the foetus, probably without intervention either of nerve or brain consciousness. And this is the origin of totem: and for this reason some tribes no doubt really *were* kangaroos: they contained the blood-knowledge of the kangaroo.- And blood knowledge comes either through the mother or through the

sex - so that dreams at puberty are as good an origin of the totem as the precept of a pregnant woman.

This is very important to our living, that we should realise that we have a blood-being, a blood-consciousness, a blood-soul, complete and apart from the mental and nerve consciousness.

Do you know what science says about these things? It is very important: the whole of our future life depends on it.

(Lawrence, 1981, pp.469-71)

Lawrence's imagination was clearly fired by Frazer, and he proceeds in this letter to appropriate Frazer's ideas for his own purposes, using them to substantiate his previously formed ideas about blood-being. He also asserts that what he is taking from Frazer's anthropology will be crucial in the 'future'; although there is also an implication, in Lawrence's need to know 'what science says' in verification, that Frazer lacks the 'sound'-ness he was later to identify in Tylor. Yet even with this implicit reservation, it is clear that Frazer underlies crucial aspects of Lawrence's thinking, and must be recognised as significant intertextually. My discussion of *Last Poems* in this chapter, then, will proceed from the assumption that a hierarchy established consciously and in a moment of excited response cannot adequately account for the process of intertextual assimilation with which I am primarily concerned. It is necessary to look in depth at Frazer and Murray as well as Tylor when exploring the animist/anthropological strain in Lawrence's late poetry.

*Tylor and Frazer as animating animist intertexts.*

As a starting-point, I will consider the striking concatenation of preoccupation and imagery in the 1928-30 poems and the 1916 letter in which Tylor is first mentioned, focusing on this passage in particular:

One must forget, only forget, turn one's eyes from the world: that is all. One must live...quite apart, forgetting, having another world, a world as yet uncreated. Everything lies in *being*, although the whole world is one colossal madness, falsity, a stupendous assertion of not-being. (Lawrence, 1981, p.593)



The need for 'forgetting' expressed in the letter is echoed in the poem entitled 'Forget' in the 'Last Poems' MS:

To be able to forget is to be able to yield  
to God who dwells in deep oblivion.  
Only in sheer oblivion are we with God.  
For when we know in full, we have left off knowing.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.29; 1993a, p.725)

There is an obvious difference between these two passages, as the former offers forgetting as a way to evade the modern world, while the latter asserts that the ability to forget facilitates an escape from consciousness and self-consciousness. However, the two poems following 'Forget' in the notebook suggest that it is an awareness of the modern world that has provoked the need to forget, and established the desirability of oblivion. One poem hints at the frenetic 'madness' of modernity - 'for man has killed the silence of the earth / and ravished all the peaceful oblivious places / where the angels used to alight' - while the other fulfils imaginatively the earlier longing for an as-yet uncreated other world: 'The world is created afresh'. This terminology may also provide a link with a passage from Frazer:

If the vernal equinox, the season at which in the temperate regions the whole face of nature testifies to a fresh outburst of vital energy, has been viewed from of old as the time when the world was annually *created afresh* in the resurrection of a god, nothing could be more natural than to place the resurrection of the new deity at the same cardinal point of the year. (Frazer, 1927, p.309; my italics)

Animism, in which the world is '*annually* created afresh' through a cyclic process of human and divine resurrection or regeneration, provides a refreshing contrast with mechanistic modernity.

Another, even more striking, coincidence of preoccupation and terminology between the 1915-6 and 1928-9 periods is evident on considering

another section of the same 1916 letter, in which Lawrence provides an example of the terrifying 'mode' of 'degeneration and decadence' referred to earlier, in which the modern world is slipping back into a worn-out morality (similar to the accusations of 'false sympathy' levelled at Whitman, provoking the pair of 'Retort' poems in the 'More Pansies' notebook, to Jesus and Whitman respectively):

But we cannot leap away, we slip back. That is the horror. We slip back and go mad. The world is going mad, as the Italian and Spanish Renaissance went mad. But where is our Reformation, where is our new light? Where even is our anathema? They had Savonarola and Luther, but we can only slip wallowing back into our old mire of 'Love thy neighbour.' It is very frightening.

(Lawrence, 1981, pp.591-93)

Twelve years later Lawrence wrote the satirical poem 'Love thy Neighbour' into the 'More Pansies' notebook, a poem I have quoted and discussed as a retort to false Whitmanesque sympathy.<sup>3</sup> Placed also in the context of the above letter, it certainly reveals Lawrence's continuing preoccupation with the irony identified in the injunction of Mark xii.31:

I love my neighbour  
but  
are these things my neighbours?  
these two-legged things that walk and talk  
and eat and cachinnate, and even seem to smile  
seem to smile, ye gods!

Am I told that these things are my neighbours?

All I can say then is Nay! nay! nay! nay! nay!

(Lawrence, MS1, p.33; 1993a, p.644)

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<sup>3</sup> Often I will quote and discuss a passage more than once in the course of my investigation. In so-doing I hope to veer away from any sense of a single or definitive perspective, emphasising that multiple contexts are potentially illuminating, and that resulting incongruities or complexities are themselves useful.



Time has elapsed between 1916 and 1928, yet the poems reveal an analogous preoccupation with a society that has not regained (and perhaps cannot regain) its footing after a catastrophic slippage: it is still perceived as being in the degeneration-phase that inhibits any development in the right direction. It seems logical to suppose that by a process of association, the notions of primitive culture and religion offered by readings of Tylor, Frazer and Murray in 1915-16 will still appear in 1928-30 as possible alternatives to degeneracy: as past worlds that can be imaginatively created afresh.

Lawrence's alternatives to degeneracy are explored in the 'More Pansies' poems in which 'living', achievable through vital connection with the cosmos, is pitted against the robotic non-existence associated with the triumph of the machine. This conception of 'living' is later articulated in *Apocalypse*:

For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive...We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos. (Lawrence, 1980, p.149)

Such life and vividness associated with the cosmos and more specifically with birds, beasts and flowers derive in part from (and are illuminated by) the notion of the 'blood-being' of all living things, that Lawrence formulated in his first enthusiastic response to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. It is blood-being or (to adopt a different kind of language, employed by Lawrence at a different time) 'floweriness' that is established by Lawrence in the 'More Pansies' MS poems as an ideal associated both with life and death:

I have always wanted to be as the flowers are  
so unhampered in their living and dying,  
and in death I believe I shall be as the flowers are.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.58; 1993a, p.677)

The 'floweriness' desired here is employed by Lawrence to articulate a retort both to his own misinterpreters, and to the unjust (because uncomprehending)

conceptions of primitivism as a state of ignorance or savagery which he has encountered in his reading of anthropology:

Oh leave off saying I want you to be savages.  
Tell me, is the gentian savage, at the top of its coarse stem?  
Oh what in you can answer to this blueness?

[I want you to be as savage] as the gentian and the daffodil.  
Tell me! tell me! is there in you a beauty to compare  
to the honeysuckle at evening now  
pouring out his breath.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.66; 1993a, p.684)

Flowers 'achieve their own floweriness and it is a miracle', while robotic men 'don't achieve their own manhood, alas, oh alas! alas!'. This lament may be related back to the poem 'Lizard' in *Pansies* (Lawrence, 1993a, p.524), and more specifically to the line 'If men were as much men as lizards are lizards / they'd be worth looking at' (the Frazerian lizard, capable of impregnating a woman with its blood-being, is perhaps suggested).

In order for man to be 're-born from the rigidity of fixed ideas / resurrected from the death of mechanical motion and emotion' he must, according to Lawrence, 'Become aware as leaves are aware / and fine as flowers are fine': none of which will prevent him from remaining 'still a man'. A failure to achieve the blood-being that affords man rooted connection with the cosmos throws him back into reliance on human contact. Consequently, it is those who are 'uprooted' who suffer from the loneliness they attribute erroneously to a lack of human touch:

People who complain of loneliness must have lost something  
lost some living connection with the cosmos, out of themselves,  
lost their life-flow  
like a plant whose roots are cut.  
And they are crying like plants whose roots are cut.  
But the presence of other people will not give them new, rooted connection  
it will only make them forget.  
The thing to do is in solitude slowly and painfully put forth new roots  
into the unknown, and take root by oneself.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.610)



The difficulty of re-rooting in isolation, emphasised here by the terms 'slowly', 'painfully' and 'unknown', had already been explored in *Women in Love*, in which Birkin finds only transient satisfaction in the connection he tries to establish with the living world, when in recoil from Hermione. The problem of 'rooting' in order to be self-sufficient creates the constant shiftings between affinity for and rejection of Lawrence's fellow-men in the 'More Pansies' notebook, evident for example on juxtaposition of the poems 'Love Thy Neighbour' and 'We Die Together'. Such ambiguity is evident in the following lines, in which the 'multitudes' act as fertiliser in the catalysing of new life, yet only after they have been ground to dust:

The multitudes are like droppings of birds, like dung of sea-fowl that have  
flown away.

Oh they are grist for the mills of God, their bones ground down  
to fertilise the roots of unknown men who are still to come  
in fresh fields.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.12; 1993a, p.615)

The necessity for new growth in 'fresh fields' after some kind of corruption is also emphasised in 'Triumph of the Machine', in which the native creatures of the unmechanised soul cause the evil machines to destroy each other; yet must find another place to inhabit because the debris of the machine still litters the contaminated middle earth.

In 'Triumph of the Machine' the 'native creatures' inherent in some people - emblematic of all that is 'natural', liberated and unmechanised - are shown to be integral (rather than incidental) to the extent that they cannot be driven out. In other 1928-30 poems the man-nature connection is seen as literal and even hereditary, as Lawrence refers to the rare men and women who elude roboticism as 'sons' (and, by implication, daughters) of the living cosmos. This is evident in the following lines, which I have introduced in the context of the pre-Socratic (and specifically Empedoclean) 'elemental' nature of mankind:

Sons of earth, sons of fire, sons of air and water  
sons of the living elements, sons of the unthinking gods,  
women, women the same.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.26; 1993a, p.635)

This conception of man as literally flowery or elemental, and the extension of this to include gods, is by no means far-fetched, when considered in terms of primitive, anthropological and animist religions, in which human and divine life seems very closely bound up with (and implicated in) the cosmos. Frazer emphasises the widespread belief among the societies he studied that 'men and women may be in fact and not merely in metaphor the sons and daughters of a god' (Frazer, 1927, pp.78-9): an assertion precisely analogous to Lawrence's poem. Just as primitive tribes felt that lizards or hawks could engender children, so they believed that the gods could do likewise, in a particular visitation. Tylor refers to the primitive doctrine of transmigration which 'widely and clearly recognises the idea of trees or smaller plants being animated by human souls' (Tylor, 1903, p.476). This belief led to such customs as were practised by the Talein of South-East Asia, who offered placatory prayers to a tree before cutting it down. Plants with souls or spirits were thought to experience pain, and hence (in Lawrence) to cry when their roots were cut. Frazer emphasises that in primitive poetry specifically the three-way relationship between earth, man and god was considered literally rather than figuratively (a notion that seems apposite when it is considered that Lawrence produced a poetry collection entitled *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*):

The earth is the great mother of all things in most mythological philosophies, and the comparison of the life of mankind or a stock of men, with the life of a tree, which is so common in Semitic as in other primitive poetry, is not in its origins a mere figure. Thus where the growth of vegetation is ascribed to a particular divine power, the same power receives the thanks and homage of his worshippers for the increase of cattle and of men. (Frazer, 1927, p.27)



Primitive cultures considered that gods, with men as their agents, were directly responsible for the behaviour of the elements; and that the procreative act performed by divine nature-gods or goddesses was essential for the growth of vegetation as well as the successful propagation of man and beast:

a great Mother Goddess, the personification of all the reproductive energies of nature, was worshipped under different names, but with a substantial similarity of myth and ritual by many people of Western Asia...associated with her was a lover, or rather series of lovers, divine yet mortal, with whom she mated year by year, their commerce being deemed essential to the propagation of animals and plants each in their several kind; and further...the fabulous union of the divine pair was simulated and, as it were, multiplied on earth by the real, though temporary, union of the human sexes at the sanctuary of the goddess for the sake of thereby ensuring the fruitfulness of the ground and the increase of man and beast. (Frazer, 1927, p.39)

According to such beliefs man was profoundly implicated in the actual workings of the natural world, and consequently achieved 'rootedness' in it as part of the cosmos. It is significant that in the above quotation the earth-goddess has similar rites and rituals across widely divergent peoples but has no specific name: the cosmic force or element (in this case the earth) is the primary focus, and the divine figure (although a personification) has not yet crystallised into any fixed shape.

*Murray's first stage: the unnamed gods.*

In *Five Stages of Greek Religion* Gilbert Murray characterises his 'first stage' as one of namelessness, before the titles of the Olympian gods were attached to the functionings of the cosmos so as to personify them, and make them man-centred. He differentiates 'anthropophuism' from other kinds of anthropomorphism in order to create this distinction:

This kind of anthropomorphism—or as Mr. Gladstone used to call it, 'anthropophuism'—'humanity of *nature*'—is primitive and inevitable:

the sharp-cut statue type of god is different, and is due in Greece directly to the work of the artists. (Murray, 1925, p.26)

He stresses that the cosmic force, creature or totem is the original: that 'Allowing for some isolated exceptions, the safest rule in all these cases is that the attribute is original and the god is added' (Murray, 1925, p.35). Lawrence often wishes for his poetry and other thinking to inhabit (or engender) this primitive, pre-Homeric 'first stage' of divine anonymity: the gods in the 'More Pansies' notebook poems are often simply 'the gods', or become amalgamated into a 'God' that fights free from specificity of association.

Consequently, in these poems 'God' does not represent the Christian figure, but remains much closer to the animist 'God of Life' conceived elsewhere by Lawrence as intimately related to the cosmos and the seasons:

Only in the country, among peasants, where the old ritual of the seasons lives on in its beauty, is there still some living, instinctive 'faith' in the God of Life. (Lawrence, 1962, p.396)

In 'God is Born!' (an implicit retort to the Christian God to match the explicit 'Retort to Jesus'), a poem with an ostensibly monotheistic title in fact focuses on a plurality of god-ly manifestations. These combine to engender wonder and awe in all living things that possess the blood-knowledge enabling them to respond. 'God' is born seven times in the relatively short poem: when the 'dim flux of unformed life' splits into light and dark; when water drips and vapour rises; when sapphires cool out of molten chaos; when the 'little eggy amoeba' emerges out of foam and nowhere; when the narcissus lifts 'a tuft of five-point stars'; when the lizard swirls its tail, the peacock turns to the sun and the leopard smites the calf with a spangled paw; and when 'at last man stood on two legs and wondered'. The poem embodies a radical reinterpretation of the Creation, as there is no omniscient creator-god who pre-dates the cosmos, for 'God is not / until he is born', and he is born and reborn as each manifestation of wonder and beauty comes to life: 'And also we see / there is no end to the



birth of God'. As in Murray's first stage, the cosmic wonders exist primarily and primevally, and the name 'God', or the names or individual gods, are attached to them subsequently, as a means by which the jubilant can articulate some kind of response.

Often in 'More Pansies' Lawrence alludes simply to 'the gods': their virtue being that they are divested of specificity, they remain mysterious (and consequently may be wonderful), and can enter into free interplay with mankind. They can be insubstantial rather than palpable, operating metaphorically and metaphysically. Lawrence refers (as I have mentioned in relation to Heraclitus) to 'The Gods, who are life, and the fluidity of living change' and to 'undeniable new gods [who] share their lives with us, when we cease to see' (Lawrence, MS1, p.44; 1993a, p.662). He also categorises mankind (as I have discussed in relation to Shelley and Swinburne) according to those who look into the eyes of the gods; those who can merely perceive the transmitted gleam on the faces of more vivid men; and those who fail to recognise that there is any gleam.

These 'gods', glimpsed sporadically by a privileged human minority, seem to exist externally, as entities beyond humankind. However, Lawrence also suggests that the gods may appear as manifestations of the inner flame, the flickering of pure life, *within* rather than beyond an individual:

The gods are all things, and so are we.

The gods are only ourselves, as we are in our moments of pure manifestation.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.56; 1993a, p.673)

Similarly, in a poem called 'Glimpses', Lawrence writes:

What's the good of a man

unless there's the glimpse of a god in him?

And what's the good of a woman

unless she's glimpse of a goddess of some sort?

(Lawrence, MS1, p.55; 1993a, p.671)





Here, 'the gods' exist according to the soul's desire, and therefore must be mind-engendered. Yet once made actual through faith or belief - once the faith-plunge is made - they become so 'real' as to acquire a corporeality that allows them to touch and be touched. Yet through becoming palpable they do not forfeit the mysteriousness or unidentifiability described in the poem 'Cold Blood', in which the narrator whose 'blood is kindled' is able to feel (without specifying) 'goddesses trafficking mysteriously through the air'.

'The gods' are malleable and unlabelled, not relying on a 'Word' or name for their being. The poem 'Name the Gods!' begins with a spirited refusal to reduce the gods through identification to any kind of order:

I refuse to name the gods, because they have no name.  
I refuse to describe the gods, because they have no form nor shape nor  
substance.

Ah, but the simple ask for images!  
Then for a time at least, they must do without. –  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.37; 1993a, p.651)

The poem thus begins with a refusal to provide names and images; with a refusal to pander to those who require images (like the versions of Olympian gods provided by Greek sculptors and artists). Its ending, in which it provides (and combines) both images and names, might be seen as oddly contradicting the initial rhetoric:

But all the time I see the gods:  
the man who is mowing the tall white corn,  
suddenly, as it curves, as it yields, the white wheat  
and sinks down with a swift rustle, and a strange, falling flatness,  
ah! the gods, the swaying body of god!  
ah the fallen stillness of god, autumnus, and it is only July  
the pale-gold flesh of Priapus dropping asleep.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.37; 1993a, p.651)

Lawrence provides 'images', although not of the idolatry or statuesque nature, for he wishes to convey a sense of the gods as embodied in humans, in their pure moments. Yet interestingly he does introduce the name of a specific pagan god - Priapus - in order to create a precise impression. In later poems in the notebook, too, he veers from his refusal to name gods to the opposite extreme, naming gods in abundance.

*All sorts of named gods.<sup>5</sup>*

The mysterious visitation of unnamed gods touching the poet's breast, heart and feet might be contrasted with the poem 'For a Moment', in which a tram-conductor is identified specifically as Hyacinthus; a running girl with 'Io, Io, who fled from Zeus, or the Danae'; Frieda with Isis (with Lawrence as her Osiris) and Pino Orioli with 'the wise yet horse-hoofed Centaur'. This subjective association of a person, known or unknown, with a particular god may be distinguished from the poems in which several gods are invoked, and yoked into (often curious) proximity. In the poem 'Be it So' the flickering of a flame within a human results not merely in a glimpse of 'the gods' but more specifically 'one of the gods, Jesus or Fafnir<sup>6</sup> or Priapus<sup>7</sup> or Siva'.<sup>8</sup> The notebook starts to seethe with a proliferation of all sorts of gods, named, given identities and even characteristics:

Man is not quite a man  
unless he has his pure moments, when he is surpassing.  
I saw an angry Italian seize an irritating little official by the throat

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<sup>5</sup> I will explain the origin and characteristics of some lesser-known deities cited by Lawrence, primarily to indicate the scope of his knowledge, reading and cultural awareness.

<sup>6</sup> In the Volsunga Saga, Fafnir was the 'worm' destroyed by Sigurd. In Wagner's opera 'Siegfried' Fafnir is the dragon that the hero destroys with his newly-forged sword.

<sup>7</sup> Son of Aphrodite: a phallic deity associated with the abundance and fertility of vegetation.

<sup>8</sup> In India the creative and destructive phallic god, represented by the 'linga'. Also a supreme deity and creative principle in Bali and Java.



and all but squeeze the life out of him:  
 and Jesus himself could not have denied that at that moment the angry man  
 was a god, in godliness pure as a Christ, beautiful  
 but perhaps Ashtaroth,<sup>9</sup> perhaps Siva, perhaps Huitzilopochtli<sup>10</sup>  
 with the dark and gleaming beauty of the messageless gods.  
 (Lawrence, MS1, p.57; 1993a, p.674)

Like Frazer, Lawrence is taking diverse gods and juxtaposing, even categorising them: this time as messageless gods, who are, by implication, free from the Word belonging to such dogmatic religions as Christianity. He is avoiding providing the image merely of a single god (which would place restriction on the imaginations of those responding): he is using multiplicity and plurality to suggest anger, beauty and danger as made manifest in many cultures, not to make a moral point about 'message' and meaning.

Perhaps, too, he is trying to emphasise the complexity of mind and motive that has made the creative effort of attention in order to engender such multifarious deities. People can be many gods, just as gods can be many people. In the poem 'Two Ways of Living and Dying' man is described as 'an iridescent fountain, rising up to flower / for a moment godly, like Baal or Krishna, or Adonis or Balder, or Lucifer'. Each deity preserves distinct characteristics, even while co-existing or conforming to a general category (such as 'messageless') for it is a manifestation (a gleam) of the tribe or chief or man who created it: it embodies the 'dark and gleaming beauty' of a specific creative urge. Yet even if each god retains specific characteristics it seems that, in Lawrence, as in Tylor and Frazer, one god leads to another: none can be freed from the inevitable process of association. If you name one god you end up by naming a good many, in order to avoid narrow image-making. This happens, comically, to Henry the Hermit, the protagonist of the short story 'The Man who was Through with the World', written probably in May 1927:

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<sup>9</sup> Western goddess of sheep-herders, equating with the Phoenician goddess of fertility Astarte.

<sup>10</sup> A son of Ometéotl and one of the four primary forces. He is both a Sun- and War- god, to whom sacrifices are made.

before he was through with everything, he had read quite a lot about Brahma<sup>11</sup> and Krishna<sup>12</sup> and Shiva, and Buddha and Confucius<sup>13</sup> and Mithras,<sup>14</sup> not to mention Zeus and Aphrodite and that bunch, nor the Wotan family. So when he began to think: The Lord is my Shepherd, somehow Shiva would start dancing a Charleston in the back of his mind, and Mithras would take the bull by the horns, and Mohammed would start patting the buttery flanks of Ayesha, and Abraham would be sitting down to a good meal off a fat ram, till the grease ran down his beard. So that it was very difficult to concentrate on God with a large 'g', and the hermit had a natural reluctance to go into refinements of the great I Am, or of thatness. He wanted to get away from all that sort of thing. For what else had he become a hermit.

(Lawrence, 1959, pp.217-18)

One image cannot be brought to mind without generating other related images: having read about all sorts of gods, it is impossible to return to one conception of 'God' with a large 'g', or to any single representation of this deity. An acceptance of plural gods is advocated in the poem 'All Sorts of Gods', which provides the antithesis of Lawrence's refusal to name the gods in other poems within the 'More Pansies' notebook:

There's all sorts of gods, all sorts and every sort,  
and every god that humanity has ever known is still a god today  
the African queer ones and Scandinavian queer ones,  
the Greek beautiful ones, the Phoenician ugly ones, the Aztec hideous ones,  
goddesses of love, goddesses of dirt, excrement-eaters or lily virgins,  
Jesus, Buddha, Jehovah and Ra,<sup>15</sup> Egypt and Babylon,  
all the gods, and you see them all if you look, alive and moving today,  
and alive and moving tomorrow, many tomorrows, as yesterdays.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.55; 1993a, p.671)

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<sup>11</sup> With Visnu and Siva, one of a trinity of creator-deities in the Hindu pantheon.

<sup>12</sup> A solar deity in India, representing love in all its forms: from erotic to mystical.

<sup>13</sup> A historical figure, worshipped by some as the god of literature.

<sup>14</sup> Greco-Roman god of soldiers, derived from the Indian and Persian model.

<sup>15</sup> Egyptian Sun-god, also considered to be the creator of heaven and earth.



In the displacement of time in which the future is envisaged in terms of the past ('many tomorrows, as yesterdays') and a combination of both constitutes the present ('alive and moving today') these lines are reminiscent of Eliot's 'Time past and time future / What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present' (Eliot, 1963, p.190). The term 'today' is the touchstone. Lawrence's mythological defining of 'today' in terms of past and future (also evident in his thoughts expressed in 'Poetry of the Present') leads to this profusion, this proliferation, of gods. The gods yoked together in 'All Sorts of Gods' (as well as the other poems I have discussed) give some indication of the knowledge that Lawrence had acquired throughout his life through his extensive reading of mythological texts; as well as through his first-hand experience of the multifarious tribes and peoples with whom he became familiar on his travels.

The poem 'All Sorts of Gods' may also be taken as a paradigm for the intertextual process by which ideas and associations are constantly generated and acquired. Each god has particularity and specificity, yet all intermingle into the mythological web: they are 'alive and moving' not only inhabiting tomorrow, but 'many tomorrows, as yesterdays'. They are 'moving' in the sense of travelling through time; they simultaneously have the power to 'move' responsive souls, because they command the imagination rather than the logical or reasoning mind. Lawrence claims that 'every god that humanity has ever known is still a god today', as the belief has arisen from the hearts and minds of the tribe or culture that created the particular images, and has then passed into the continuum of tradition and human history.

### *Return of the Olympians.*

The 'More Pansies' notebook is full of all sorts of gods: gods belonging to diverse mythologies and named accordingly. In the succeeding 'Last Poems' notebook, however, Lawrence stages a specifically Olympian return, as the

naming of these gods unequivocally reveals. In *The Golden Bough*, describing the Alexandrian ceremony for the death and resurrection of Adonis, Frazer quotes Theocritus' observation of the lamenting people: 'Yet they sorrowed not without hope, for they sang that the lost one would come back again' (Frazer, 1927, p.225). In the 'Last Poems' notebook, Lawrence sings of the Olympian gods who 'will without fail come back again':

And now that the moon who gives men glistening bodies  
is in her exaltation, and can look down on the sun  
I see descending from the ships at dawn  
slim naked men from Cnossos, smiling the archaic smile  
of those who will without fail come back again,  
and kindling little fires on the shores  
and crouching, and speaking the music of lost languages.

And the Minoan Gods, and the Gods of Tiryns  
are heard softly laughing and chatting, as ever;  
and Dionysos, young and a stranger  
leans listening on the gate, in all respect.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.2; 1993a, p.688)

In this poem, 'Middle of the World', as in 'The Greeks are Coming!', 'The Argonauts' and 'For the Heroes are Dipped in Scarlet', Lawrence embarks upon a kind of 'return' which adds new complexity and new poignancy to his conception of God and the gods. The return of the gods who cannot fail to return (an assertion which may sound either confident or wistful) perhaps engages with and extends the 'More Pansies' depiction of the native creatures of a man's soul which 'cannot die'. The 'return' of the Olympians, seen consequently as inevitable, is presented as neither surprising nor ostentatious: the gods are 'softly laughing and chatting, as ever', crouching rather as Il Duro is described in *Twilight in Italy*, or like the Eastwood miners of Lawrence's youth squatting on their heels as they talk and laugh after work.

In the soft laughter, the naturalness and the manner of their coming, these gods relate to the Etruscan culture, experienced by Lawrence during his



trip to Italy in April 1927. My next chapter will explore in depth the extent and significance of this encounter with a specific primitive culture. However, even though (as I shall argue) the gods that arrive have distinctively Etruscan features and characteristics, they are specifically referred to as 'Greeks', and they arrive in Aegean ships from Cnossos:

And every time it is ships, it is ships  
it is ships of Cnossos coming out of the morning end of the sea,  
it is Aegean ships, and men with archaic pointed beards  
coming out of the eastern end.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.1; 1993a, p.687)

The reference to the 'morning end of the sea', as well as the specific mention of Odysseus in the following poem 'The Argonauts', links directly with the letter written by Lawrence after arriving in Bandol on 4 October 1929: 'I still love the Mediterranean, it still seems young as Odysseus in the morning' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.509).

The association made here of the journeying hero Odysseus with the 'morning-glamorous' Mediterranean is one that Lawrence had established earlier, in *Sea and Sardinia*:

How wonderful it must have been to Ulysses to venture into this Mediterranean and open his eyes on all the loveliness of the tall coasts...There is something eternally morning-glamorous about these lands as they rise from the sea. And it is always the Odyssey which comes back to one as one looks at them. All the lovely morning-wonder of this world, in Homer's day. (Lawrence, 1985a, p.197)

It seems inevitable that Lawrence's vision of the returning gods in his 1928-30 writing would encompass associations derived from earlier imaginative responses specifically to the Mediterranean and more generally to the South. In a letter written at Taormina, on 1 June 1920, Lawrence asserted that:

The South is so different from the north. I believe morality is a purely climatic thing...Here the past is so much stronger than the present, that

one seems remote like the immortals, looking back at the world from their otherworld. A great indifference comes over me - I feel the present isn't real. (Lawrence, 1984, p.538)

By implication this passage attributes a preoccupation with the past to the experience of inhabiting a particular location, so that Lawrence's physical arrival at Bandol may be identified as the provocation for his allusions specifically to the Greek deities at the outset of 'Last Poems'. He was enabled in his new locality (frequently in bed overlooking the sea) to perceive visions of epic grandeur, as Keats in Italy had before him, in very different circumstances:

I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds—No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my spirit the office of which is equivalent to a king's body guard—then 'Tragedy, with scepter'd pall, comes sweeping by'. According to my state of mind I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily. Or I throw my whole being into Triolus and repeating those lines, 'I wander, like a lost soul upon the stygian Banks staying for waftage.' I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone...

(Keats, 1970, p.170)

In Lawrence's case the gods were stationed not around him, but in the distance, infinitely tempting though (or because) ungraspable.

The 'Olympian' visions provoked a contrast that again finds a parallel in Keats, this time in a poem included in a letter to his brother Tom, in which Keats refers to the contamination of the pure, magical sea (surrounding Fingal's Cave) by modern vessels:

So for ever will I leave  
Such a taint and soon unweave  
All the magic of the place -  
It is now free to stupid face  
To cutters and to fashion boats  
To cravats and to Petticoats.

(Keats, 1970, p.144)



Analogously, Lawrence's poem 'Middle of the World' contrasts modern pollution with the endurance of the (magically) primitive:

What do I care if the smoking ships  
of the P. + O. and the Orient Line and all the other stinkers  
cross like clock-work the Minoan distance!  
They only cross, the distance never changes.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.2; 1993a, p.688)

The modern world, it seems, is inevitably intrusive; and although the Minoan distance itself cannot be altered, the steamships pollute the middle of the world just as (in 'Triumph of the Machine') debris of the machine pollutes the middle earth. The difference between these poems and those in the 'More Pansies' notebook is that here it is specifically the Minoan Gods and Gods of Tiryns who provide the contrast.

It is possible to suggest an intertextual rather than biographical (an alternative or complementary) approach, which may illuminate Lawrence's use of the Minoan or Olympian gods in 'Last Poems'. This approach is based on the 'stages' of Greek religion described in Gilbert Murray's *Five Stages of Greek Religion*. I have already discussed the way in which the 'More Pansies' poems, depicting numerous unnamed gods, may be related to Murray's first, or primal, stage. Murray describes the transition from the primal to the Olympian (second) stage, conceiving the former as an 'Age of Ignorance, before Zeus came to trouble men's minds, a stage to which our anthropologists and explorers have found parallels in every part of the world':

Dr. Preuss applies to it the charming word 'Urdummheit', or 'Primal Stupidity'. In some ways characteristically Greek, in others it is so typical of similar stages of thought elsewhere that one is tempted to regard it as the normal beginning of all religion, or almost as the normal raw material out of which religion is made. There is certainly some repulsiveness, but I confess that to me there is also an element of fascination in the study of these 'Beastly Devices of the Heathen', at any rate as they appear in early Greece, where each single 'beastly device' as it passes is somehow touched with beauty and transformed by some spirit of upward striving.

Secondly there is the Olympian or classical stage, a stage in which, for good or ill, blunderingly or successfully, this primitive vagueness was reduced to a kind of order. This is the stage of the great Olympian gods, who dominated art and poetry, ruled the imagination of Rome, and extended a kind of romantic dominion even over the Middle Ages. It is the stage that we learn, or mis-learn, from the statues and the handbooks of mythology. Critics have said that this Olympian stage has value only as art and not as religion.

(Murray, 1925, pp. 16-17)

Lawrence's attitude towards primitivism stands, of course, in absolute antithesis to the 'Primal Stupidity' approach. Yet in his poems dealing with the 'God of Life' - and especially in the poems which proliferate multiple gods - he might be said to be employing deliberately a 'primitive vagueness'. His 'More Pansies' poems seem to oscillate between two different 'primitive' conceptions of the gods. The first is the primal (pre-Christian, pre-Socratic) condition in which the seasons and workings of nature are seen to dictate human life, so that man exists in harmony with the cosmos and there is no need for the creation of intermediary gods to compensate for humanity's dislocation. The second stems from the progression beyond this in which man's sense of the cosmos became man-centred, assuming, for example, that the wind blows because a greater being of some sort is blowing with his cheeks. This personification of the elements led man to conceive of gods, divine powers named or unnamed, who represented and embodied various aspects of the cosmic forces.

Lawrence's progression beyond cosmic connection and all sorts of gods to the Olympian gods of 'The Greeks are Coming!', 'The Argonauts' and 'Middle of the World' might usefully be explored as a deliberate echo of the psychological and ideological progression between the first two stages of Greek religion as described by Murray. New *order* is established: a specific mythology is invoked which is successful in providing a contrast with the spiritually impoverished modern world. The gods are no longer unidentifiable, but may be recognised or understood as Odysseus, Dionysos, and later Hermes.



One advantage of actualising the gods in this way is that they may (within a poem) be visualised, approached and conversed with. When unnamed and mysterious 'the gods' can perhaps knead human feet silently and disappear unseen; even when named, the 'More Pansies' gods are generally fleeting and insubstantial. Yet if the god has a specific identity - if he is life-sized and palpable, rather than merely a gleam emanating sporadically from a passer-by - he can come into human touch or contact: the soft flow of touch which is evident in the relationships of the Etruscans, which is so significant in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and which is essential to the preservation of life in 'A Dream of Life'.

A 'Last Poems' Olympian can appear as a visitor and be identified intuitively:

But a naked man, a stranger, leaned on the gate  
with his cloak over his arm, waiting to be asked in.  
So I called him: Come in, if you will! -  
He came in slowly, and sat down by the hearth.  
I said to him: And what is your name? -  
He looked at me without answer, but such a loveliness  
entered me, I smiled to myself, saying: He is God!  
So he said: *Hermes!*

(Lawrence, MS2, p.5; 1993a, p.692)

The appearance of the Olympians as palpable beings gives Lawrence a chance to enact dramatically the situation in which a vivid man recognises, responds to and looks into the eyes of a god. The narrator is infused with the loveliness emanating from Hermes: a god who can be touched and known, rather than remaining an abstraction.

### *Spanning stages: the mythologisation of 'Bavarian Gentians'.*

The progression from animism to the evocation of Olympian deities evident in the first poems of the 'Last Poems' notebook may shed light on Lawrence's

mythologisation of the poem 'Bavarian Gentians', drafted twice in 'Last Poems' and previously in the 'More Pansies' notebook (each of these drafts has been extensively revised).<sup>16</sup> The gentian flowers begin as manifestations of beauty, wonder and nobility (by implication associated with the unnamed creator-god who strives among the mud and mastodons to engender beauty), and they cause the responsive soul to journey downwards into mysterious depths of fulfilment and happiness:

They have added blueness to blueness, until  
it is dark: beauty of darkness  
blue joy of my soul  
Bavarian gentians  
your dark blue gloom is so noble!

How deep I have gone  
dark gentians  
since I embarked on your dark blue fringes,  
how deep, how deep, how happy!  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.65; 1992a pp.263-64)

The flowers embody a cosmic beauty that might be pitted against simplistic and erroneous conceptions of savagery and primitivism.

Yet in the 'More Pansies' notebook a pencil version exists alongside the initial draft: it may have been written soon after the first draft had been completed, or possibly when Lawrence was writing a new version of the poem into the 'Last Poems' notebook, and returned to alter and revise the original. It is impossible to tell exactly when the 'mythologisation' of this poem took place, although interestingly it is possible to define a particular point in the pencil draft at which the Persephone idea first suggested itself. In the second short stanza, the first-draft line 'How deep I have gone' has unsurprisingly provoked an association with the underworld:

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Pollnitz has identified seven distinct stages in the composition of this poem, as he will indicate in his impending Cambridge University Press variorum edition of *Complete Poems*.



It is so blue, it is so dark  
in the dark doorway  
and the way is open  
to Hades.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.65; 1992a, pp.263-64)

It is at this point that Persephone intervenes, almost as though she has taken the poet by surprise:

Oh, I know.  
Persephone has just gone back  
down the thickening thickening gloom  
of dark-blue gentians to Pluto  
to her bridegroom in the dark  
and all the dead  
and all the dark great ones of the underworld  
down there, down there  
down the blue depths of  
mountain gentian flowers  
cold cold  
are gathering to a  
wedding in the winter dark  
down the dark blue path

(Lawrence, MS1, pp.65-6; 1992a, p.264)

The flower becomes linked with a mythological return and descent into the underworld, Persephone being the goddess who emblematises the cycle of the seasons, as she inhabits the lower and upper worlds in turn.

Tylor describes the way in which the seasons' oscillation has been dramatised in the myth of Persephone, and draws attention to the way in which the naming of the gods concretises the myth's significance:

The explanation of the rape of Persephone, as a nature-myth of the seasons and the fruits of the earth, does not depend alone on analogy of incident, but has the very names to prove its reality, Zeus, Helios, Demeter - Heaven, and Sun, and Mother Earth. (Tylor, 1903, p.321)

Lawrence, employing his personification of the seasons in 'Bavarian Gentians', is able to create a drama: a vivid evocation of the descent from Demeter's

white day into the Etruscan-tomb-like Hades. The Etruscan association gives insight into the nature of the imagined journey: it becomes (in both versions of the poem in the 'Last Poems' notebook) a directed, purposeful descent rather than simply a soul's journey into some unknown depths, the sort of journey described in 'The Ship of Death' in which the soul is alone, fearful and vulnerable. In 'Bavarian Gentians' the traveller descending Orpheus-wise into Hades is 'in touch' with other shadowy beings, moving from the upper world to a marriage ritual in the world below, guiding himself with the aid of a gentian rather than an acetylene lamp:

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!  
 let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower  
 down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness  
 even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September  
 to the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark  
 and Persephone herself is but a voice  
 or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark  
 of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,  
 among the splendour of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on the lost  
 bride and her groom.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.8; 1993a, p.679)

The scene is vivid, yet the Persephone-Pluto relationship is conceived metaphorically, as though the gods are operating in their emblematic capacity rather than as palpable, physical beings who interact as humans do. Persephone is 'enfolded in the deeper dark / of the arms Plutonic' and is pierced not by Pluto himself but by the 'passion of dense gloom'.

By contrast, in the draft of 'Bavarian Gentians' that appears on the following page of the 'Last Poems' MS, the impact of the poem is much more direct, more literal.<sup>17</sup> This draft contains the lines:

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<sup>17</sup> The assumption that this version of the poem is only a draft has been contested by Keith Sagar in 'The Genesis of Bavarian Gentians' (Sagar, 1975) and recently by Christopher Pollnitz in his article 'Cough-Prints and Other Intimacies: Considerations in Editing Lawrence's Later Verse' (Pollnitz, 1995).



...and Persephone herself is but a voice, as a bride,  
a gloom invisible enfolded in the deeper dark  
of the arms of Pluto as he ravishes her once again  
and pierces her once more with his passion of the utter dark.  
among the splendour of black-blue torches, shedding fathomless  
darkness on the nuptials.

Give me a flower on a tall stem, and three dark flames,  
for I will go to the wedding, and be wedding-guest  
at the marriage of the living dark.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.960)

The language is more explicitly sexual, as is anticipated earlier in the poem by the description of the flowers as 'ribbed hellish flowers erect, with their blaze of darkness spread blue'; it is also less metaphorical. Persephone is enfolded not in the 'arms Plutonic' but in the 'arms of Pluto' who 'ravishes her once again / and pierces her once more with his passion of the utter dark'. The nuptials now may be envisaged clearly in terms of the sexual interaction between the two pagan deities, and the narrator himself is more actively 'present' as is evident in the last three added lines in which he describes himself as a 'wedding-guest'. He has presumably received an invitation so does not stumble arbitrarily upon the scene, and does not impose. He is part of the 'living dark': the fecundity of the marriage/sex ritual possessed of the quality of life identified on the descent into an Etruscan tomb, in which it is possible to feel like a participant in the incessant banqueting and revelry. The fecundity too is one whose implications extend beyond the single union to the whole of life: to the propagation of all plant and animal growth; to the oscillation of day and night; to the progression of the seasons.

*Behind the Olympians: the half-lit regions.*

'Bavarian Gentians', then (particularly in the form of the second draft printed in 'Last Poems'), is reaching back behind the Olympian gods to the raw material underlying their initial conception: to the fertility and regenerative potency of

the cosmos as envisaged by primitive tribes. Murray refers to this hidden realm lurking behind the dazzling Olympian divinities:

But we have other evidence too which shows abundantly that these Olympian gods are not primary, but are imposed upon a background strangely unlike themselves. For a long time the luminous figures dazzled our eyes, we were not able to see the half-lit regions behind them, the dark primeval tangle of desires and fears and dreams from which they drew their vitality. (Murray, 1925, p.28)

The primeval potency and fertility (particularly in relation to the sexual) underlying the Olympians is suggested elsewhere in 'Last Poems': notably in 'The Man of Tyre', 'They Say the Sea is Loveless' and 'Whales Weep Not!'. The first is especially interesting in relation to Frazer, who makes frequent reference to the kings of Tyre who achieved the status of gods, and in one paragraph makes an association between a famous king of Tyre and the goddess Aphrodite:

The story of Pygmalion points to a ceremony of a sacred marriage in which the king wedded the image of Aphrodite, or rather of Astarte. If that was so, the tale was in a sense true, not of a single man only, but of a whole series of men, and it would be all the more likely to be told of Pygmalion, if that was a common name of Semitic kings in general, and of Cyprian kings in particular. Pygmalion, at all events, is known as the famous king of Tyre from whom his sister Dido fled...

(Frazer, 1927, p.50)

'The Man of Tyre' dramatises an encounter between a man (rather than a king) of Tyre and a woman emerging from the sea who possesses a 'godly and lovely' mien that immediately causes the watcher to identify her as Aphrodite:

Oh lovely, lovely with the dark hair piled up, as she went deeper,  
deeper down the channel, then rose shallower, shallower,  
with the full thighs slowly lifting of the wader wading shorewards  
and the shoulders pallid with light from the silent sky behind  
both breasts dim and mysterious, with the glamorous kindness of  
twilight between them  
and the dim blotch of black maidenhair like an indicator,



giving a message to the man -

...here in the twilight  
godly and lovely comes Aphrodite out of the sea  
towards me!

(Lawrence, MS2, p.5; 1993a, pp.692-93) <sup>18</sup>

I have argued that, in the 'More Pansies' notebook, 'the gods' are often identified in the bodies or faces of people as they appear in sporadic manifestations. Here, the physical beauty, the body, of the woman gives her a specific identity as a particular Olympian goddess.<sup>19</sup>

Yet in the poem 'Whales Weep Not!' Aphrodite assumes a very different identity, inhabiting the form of another manifestation of cosmic energy:

And bull-whales gather their women and whale-calves in a ring  
when danger threatens, on the surface of the ceaseless flood  
and range themselves like great fierce Seraphim facing the threat  
encircling their huddled monsters of love.  
And all this happens in the sea, in the salt  
where God is also love, but without words:  
and Aphrodite is the wife of whales  
most happy, happy she!

(Lawrence, MS2, pp.6-7; 1993a, p.695)

Lawrence is evidently allowing Aphrodite (and by extension the other Olympian deities) to remain fluid, to retain their Greek labels but to metamorphose into different shapes and forms, thus maintaining their dark, primeval nameless implications. By so-doing he attempts to avoid a situation in which a signifier-image is presented that instantly attaches itself to a particular definition.

'The simple ask for images', but Lawrence refuses to provide crystallised or even hard-edged versions of the Olympian gods which would be

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<sup>18</sup> I have previously quoted and discussed this last stanza in relation to Swinburne's evocations of Aphrodite.

<sup>19</sup> This Aphrodite emerges from the foam yet remains crucially distinct from Lawrence's earlier Aphrodite of the foam, associated with an aggressive, masturbatory sexuality.

analogous to the gem-like poetry of the past and future he described in 'Poetry of the Present'. Murray too recognises the propensity of the Greek gods to become rigid and static:

They crystallize hard. They will no longer melt or blend, at least not at an ordinary temperature. In the fourth and third centuries we hear a great deal about the gods all being one, 'Zeus the same as Hades, Hades as Helios, Helios the same as Dionysus', but the amalgamation only takes place in the white heat of ecstatic philosophy or the rites of religious mysticism. (Murray, 1925, p.86)

According to Murray, it was at the time of Homer (the beginning of his second stage of Greek religion) that the Olympians were both crystallised and (perhaps in Hermes' case) bowdlerised:

the contrast between the Homeric gods and the gods found outside Homer is well compared by Mr. Chadwick to the difference between the gods of the Edda and the historical traces of religion outside the Edda. The gods who feast with Odin in Asgard, forming an organized community or *comitatus*, seem to be the gods of the kings, distinct from the gods of the peasants, cleaner and more war-like and lordlier, though in actual religious quality much less vital.

(Murray, 1925, pp.80-81)

Homer divested the gods of the old primitive associations which he found rather distasteful, and has been made subject to this accusation as a consequence: 'There is not much faith in these gods, as they appear to us in the Homeric poems, and not much respect, except perhaps for Apollo and Athena and Poseidon'. The poem 'Middle of the World', in which Dionysos leans on the gate 'in all respect', suggests that Lawrence identified mutual respect and tolerance as a distinguishing mark of the Olympians portrayed in 'Last Poems'.

Hermes provides a good example of a god who actually changed radically in his Homeric incarnation. Murray describes his origin as follows:

Originally, outside Homer, Hermes was simply an old upright stone, a pillar furnished with the regular Pelasgian sex-symbol of procreation.



Set up over a tomb he is the power that generates new lives, or, in the ancient conception, brings the souls back to be born again. He is the Guide of the Dead, the Psychopompos, the divine Herald between the two worlds. If you have a message for the dead, you speak it to the Herm at the grave. This notion of Hermes as herald may have been helped by his use as a boundary-stone - the Latin *Terminus*. Your boundary-stone is your representative, the deliverer of your message, to the hostile neighbour or alien. If you wish to parley with him, you advance up to your boundary-stone. If you go, as a Herald, peacefully, into his territory, you place yourself under the protection of the same sacred stone, the last sign that remains of your own safe country. If you are killed or wronged, it is he, the immovable Watcher, who will avenge you. (Murray, 1925, p.76)

Murray comments that 'this phallic stone post was quite unsuitable to Homer. It was not decent; it was not quite human; and every personage in Homer has to be both', and he also quotes Pausanias' assertion that 'thanks to Homer '[Hermes] is purified of his old phallicism' (Murray, 1925, p.77). The unacceptable phallicism led to Hermes being removed from the *Iliad*; and, in the *Odyssey*, he is 'so changed and castigated that no one would recognize the old Herm in the beautiful and gracious youth who performs the gods' messages'. I suspect that the old (Etruscan-like <sup>20</sup>) Hermes would have been more appealing to Lawrence than the Homeric one: and that it is the former rather than the latter who fills the narrator of 'Maximus' with loveliness as he leans naked on the gatepost, waiting to enter into the subtle flow of touch.<sup>21</sup>

It seems that Lawrence, in his poetically evoked return of the Olympians, creates a state of pre-Homeric consciousness in between Murray's first two stages: a time when man was beginning to attach names to the cosmic 'raw material', but without personifying it to the extent that gods become named, fixed and statuesque, as they did later, in Homer's time. He wants to

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<sup>20</sup> C.f. *Sketches of Etruscan Places*: 'Here it is, big and little, standing by the doors, or inserted, quite small, into the rock: the phallic stone!' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.19).

<sup>21</sup> It is also possible, although by no means certain, particularly as the poem has no ostensible reference to any Olympian divinity, that when writing 'The Boundary Stone' (Lawrence, 1993a, p.706), Lawrence had the ancient Hermes, as implanted by Murray, at the back of his mind.

return imaginatively to the Minoan and Etruscan ages, in which the Olympian gods are coming for the first time: Dionysos is 'young and a stranger' and listens quietly and respectfully to the gods who have come before him and already inhabit the land to which he has come.

***'Last Poems': a superimposition of gods.***

The return of the Olympians differentiates 'Last Poems' from the previous 'More Pansies' notebook: consequently the progression from one to the other might be seen as following Murray's linear development, even if it stops mid-stage, before the Olympians are divested of their primeval implications. Yet the complexity of the 'Last Poems' book would thereby be falsified, for the previous God and gods images are not simply rejected and superseded. The increased complexity arises from the inevitable nature of development through association: the old is not replaced or superseded by the new, the two are simply superimposed. Or, to explain the complexity in a rather different way, Lawrence does not reach any conclusion or resolution, establish a set hierarchy of gods/images or ascertain the most satisfactory kind of pagan return. Rather, he explores and combines images, gods and myths, overriding the improbability and incongruity latent in his approach.

So, for example, as well as the Olympian deities Lawrence also retains versions of the Christian god, though he reinterprets him by drawing on rites and rituals of the primitive, pre-Christian, cultures. The poem 'The Old Way of Sacrifice' in the 'More Pansies' notebook has juxtaposed and contrasted ancient rites with modern Christian misconceptions regarding self-sacrifice. Similarly, the poem 'Lord's Prayer' in 'Last Poems' offers a pagan alternative to a crucial text of the Christian tradition. The 'kingdom, power and glory' claimed in the poem is neither that of mercy and submission nor of unspecified grandeur, but rather 'the kingdom of the fox in the dark / yapping in his power



and his glory / which is death to the goose'. The narrator calls for his 'mana', a term which must be understood in its pagan rather than Christian definition:

The bull was the chief of magic or sacred animals in Greece, chief because of his enormous strength, his size, his rage, in fine, as anthropologists call it, his *mana*; that primitive word which comprises force, vitality, prestige, holiness, and power of magic, and which may belong equally to a lion, a chief, a medicine-man, or a battle-axe.

(Murray, 1925, p.34)

Murray describes how in pagan ceremonies 'You devoured the holy animal to get its *mana*, its swiftness, its strength, its great endurance, just as the savage now will eat his enemy's brain or heart or hands to get some particular quality residing there (Murray, 1925, p.37).

'Mana of the Sea' (also in 'Last Poems', and discussed previously in the context of Swinburne's sea imagery and Empedocles' water/fire dichotomy) reveals 'mana' as existing in Lawrence's vocabulary as a synonym for blood-being or blood-knowledge. The poet's aspiration is expressed in the following rhetoric:

Have I caught from it  
the tide in my arms  
that runs down to the shallows of my wrists, and breaks  
abroad in my hands, like waves among the rocks of substance?  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.15; 1993a, p.705)

The poem ends with the assertion 'I am the sea, I am the sea!' The poet has 'become' the sea through 'catching from it' its mana, just as the tribes described by Lawrence in his letter about 'blood-being' (quoted earlier) literally 'become' Kangaroos through an equivalent acquisition of blood-knowledge.

The mana poems seem to suggest the primacy of the living, fecund cosmos in which the most significant realisation is that of the aliveness of the natural world, and the wonder inherent in the creative urge. Consequently Lawrence is unwilling to lose sight of the unnamed, mysterious creator god that

sighs with tremendous creative yearning and eludes identification. In one poem this god is brought into curious conjunction with a visiting Olympian:

God is older than the sun and moon  
and the eye cannot behold him  
nor the voice describe him:  
and still, this is the god Hermes, sitting by my hearth  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.5; 1993a, p.692)

The conjunction invites a series of paradoxes: God is nameless yet can be given a name or names; he is both unseen and visible; he is both insubstantial and a palpable presence. Then the two consecutive poems 'Bodiless God' and 'The Body of God' offer antithetical attitudes to the question of god's corporeality. The former, after asserting that everything beautiful has being in the flesh, and that dreams are only 'drawn from bodies that are' reads:

And God?  
Unless God has a body, how can he have a voice  
and emotions, and desires, and strength, glory or honour?  
For God, even the rarest God, is supposed to love us  
and wish us to be this that and the other.  
And he is supposed to be mighty and glorious.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.4; 1993a, p.691)

Yet the following poem begins 'God is the great urge that has not yet found a body / but urges towards incarnation with the great creative urge' (Lawrence, MS2, p.4; 1993a, p.691). The poems wrestle with the problem of a god who must have a body in order to be truly living, yet is also the god of becoming, eluding fixed identity; or that is simultaneously indescribable and 'sitting by my hearth'. This is not a paradox that is, or can be, resolved.

Similarly, god in 'Last Poems' exists as a single creator-god yet has multiple or infinitely plural manifestations, as is recognised by the Man of Tyre who ponders this very question:



The man of Tyre went down to the sea  
pondering, for he was Greek, that God is one and all alone and ever more  
shall be so.<sup>22</sup>

So in the cane-brake he clasped his hands in delight  
that could only be god-given, and murmured:  
Lo! God is one god! But here in the twilight  
godly and lovely comes Aphrodite out of the sea  
towards me!

(Lawrence, MS2, p.5; 1993a, pp.692-93)

Manifestations of god's plurality and capacity to metamorphose are allowed to co-exist with monotheism. Yet it is possible to read the phrase 'God is one god!' as having another implication. God with a capital 'G' is one god - he is *merely* one god - that of the Christians. He is *only* one god, and there are others: the gods of other peoples, or other religions, of other creeds - and, we must recall, they are all alive and moving today; they will inhabit many tomorrows, as yesterdays. A pluralistic conception of gods enables different creeds and ideologies to co-exist, thus allowing 'all the differences [to be] given expression'. This has been made evident in the 'More Pansies' MS poem 'Bells', in which divergent beliefs are linked through Lawrence's consideration of the various ways of calling, gathering or gaining the attention of others which bells demonstrate. The various methods are referred to as 'other ways of summons': *other*, not better or worse. Birkin's social ideal comes to mind, in which people are recognised as intrinsically other and there are no terms of comparison.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly religions are intrinsically 'other' because they emanate from belief which itself eludes definition and rigidity, though being

Forever nameless  
Forever unknown  
Forever unconceived

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<sup>22</sup> See the lines 'One and one is all alone, / and ever more shall be so' in the song 'Green Grow the Rushes, Oh! - a song involving pagan symbolism (see Broadwood and Maitland, 1898, pp.158-59).

<sup>23</sup> C.f. *Women in Love*: Lawrence, 1987a, pp.103-4.

Forever unrepresented  
Yet forever felt in the soul.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.16; 1993a, p.622)

God may be given as many names as the rocking-horse in 'The Rocking-Horse Winner', yet he will remain, in the last resort, unknown and unknowable. The earlier poem 'Fish' embodies the devastating realisation that 'I didn't know his God'; the frightening but also liberating awareness of 'Other Gods / Beyond my range...gods beyond my God' (Lawrence, 1993a, p.338). It is analogously difficult to come to terms with the multiple gods of the primitive men who 'slimly went like fishes, and didn't care' (Lawrence, 1993a, MS2, p.3; p.688). It is a consequence of this realisation that forgetting or ceasing through yielding are seen as ways to come into touch with God: 'To be able to forget is to be able to yield / to God who dwells in deep oblivion' (Lawrence, MS2, p.29; 1993a, p.725).

For his last 'God' described in the 'Last Poems' notebook - the God of 'Shadows' - Lawrence returns to an unnamed and unknown deity whose presence, interestingly, is definable only in terms of the natural world, the cosmos in its seasonal oscillations:

And if tonight my soul may find her peace  
in sleep, and sink in good oblivion,  
and in the morning wake like a new flower  
then I have been dipped again in God, and new-created.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.726)

The poem seems to return to and develop the curiously premature 'More Pansies' poem 'Gladness of Death', which Mara Kalnins has related to the cyclicity of the pagan consciousness, and which reveals the fluid nature of Lawrence's poetry writing. 'Shadows' is appropriately cyclic and 'primitive' as it engages primarily with Lawrence's sense of the 'changing phases of a man's life' which seem to follow nature's pattern in which the moon waxes and wanes and flowers blossom and fade, thus provoking the knowledge that even in the



most critical illness 'I shall know that my life is moving still / with the dark earth, and drenched / with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal'. Lawrence's longed-for renewal in *life* was envisaged as a breaking out beyond the mid-life crisis of maladjustment and conflict, as expressed in a letter of 5 September 1929:

How tired I am of my ill-health. - But my ill-health is the same as your loss of energy - it's a sort of masculine change of life. It's a change of the whole psychic rhythm, and of most of the psychic values. It means, not only a maladjustment to the present system, but a whole conflict and finally a break with the present system. And we have to accept the ill-health and the loss of energy. Because all the energy that ran concurrent with the present system now leaves us, drains away, like an up-rooted tree, and will not come back till we make new roots in a new emotion. (Lawrence, 1993c, pp.464-65)

Earth's lapse and renewal provide a suitable model for Lawrence's own desire to live again, for the cosmos can be '*annually* created afresh'.

Recovery is consequently envisaged in these terms:

and still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of renewal  
odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers  
such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me --

then I must know that still  
I am in the hands [of] the unknown God,  
he is breaking me down to his own oblivion  
to send me forth on a new morning, a new man.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.727)

Rebirth is conceived in seasonal terms, yet a desire for intimacy must be satisfied by a Being with whom you may walk 'close together', and who takes you gently between his hands in an act of tenderness. The God who dictates the changing phases of the cosmos must not only supervise the changing phases of a man's life, but must fulfil the need for physical touch. So the god of 'Shadows' remains paradoxical, embodying aspects of many of the diverse gods who occupy the 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems' notebooks.

A critical response (especially one which acknowledges the complexity of intertextuality) must refrain from attempting to 'solve' or 'resolve' the paradoxes and incongruities arising from Lawrence's struggle with 'all sorts of gods'. Rather, it should recognise that the mythology embodied and explored in these poems 'is only to the full intelligible and admirable if we realize it as a superb and baffled endeavour, not a telos or completion but a movement and effort of life' (Murray, 1925, p.86). It is unsurprising that Lawrence made such an 'effort' in his *Last Poems*, and that such authors as Tylor, Frazer, and Murray seem to have provided crucial intertexts for his late understanding of - and writings on - ancient civilisations. Lawrence may, as a consequence of this preoccupation, be located in an early twentieth century tradition which attempted - via anthropology - to recover beliefs and languages which had once been important in human culture, and which in modern times may be seen as necessary again.



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## Chapter 6 Intra-textuality and the Etruscans

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### *Intra-textual roots.*

What happens through the proliferations, echoes and decentralisations of the intra-text in the new frame is the reinterpretation of a writing experience through regeneration from the same roots.

(Orr, 1993, p.183) <sup>1</sup>

In the intertextual study of Claude Simon to which I have already referred, Mary Orr discusses the sub-category *intra-textuality*, which is concerned with the interrelation between texts written by the same author. The works of one author, she asserts, clearly have common roots, so that texts within a corpus will constitute rewritings/recontextualisations of previous material. Orr considers the youthful writer as a 'precursor' through being 'an early and unquestionable version of himself', arguing that as a result of what to her is undeniable continuity 'the later figuration will embody the language of the earlier works' (Orr, 1993, p.3). The term 'intra-textuality' derives from Fitch (1983, p.85), and Orr clarifies her own use of the term by distinguishing it from '*intratextualité* or those processes of linguistic reverberations which operate within one text field' (Orr, 1993, p.175). Intra-textuality (involving multiple texts rather than a single work) is obviously much more complex, and requires a wide-ranging analytic approach analogous to that employed in the consideration of the links between texts by different authors.

'Intra-textuality' is not, however, the only term employed by critics to designate the complex linguistic correlations between texts within the corpus of a single writer. Ann Jefferson, as I have previously indicated, adopts the terms

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<sup>1</sup> The language used by Mary Orr serves as a useful starting-point but seems muddled. It is problematic, for example, to assert that an 'experience' can be reinterpreted 'through regeneration' from 'roots'.

and categories employed by Gerard Genette in *Palimpsestes*, but feels the need to create a new term that applies to the same-author text relation:

as far as I know there doesn't exist a term to describe the relations between one text and another within the corpus (and more particularly between those texts which fall within the same generic category) of a given author. These relations are not actively intertextual in that they don't entail explicit or implied comment on one text by another, nor any transformation through rewriting of one text by another, but it is nevertheless an intertextual relationship that is enormously powerful for readers: one of the first moves in any reading is to place a new text in the intertextual context of the corpus to which it belongs. Since we are dealing here with texts that are 'from the same stable', I coin the term *sister-text* to describe the relation between novel and novel - and novel and autobiography when the latter is regarded as a continuation of the former. (Jefferson, 1990, pp.110-11)

The writing here seems limited in its suggestion that 'sister-texts' are not 'actively intertextual': certainly texts by the same author do at times 'entail explicit or implied comment on one text by another', and undergo 'transformation through rewriting of one text by another'. Otherwise the term 'sister-textuality' appears to be intended as synonymous with Fitch's 'intra-textuality', although in Jefferson's usage the term seems primarily to apply to texts within the same generic category, such as novel and novel. This generic approach facilitates the process of selection, and arranges material in a manageable and coherent way. However, it fails to acknowledge the inevitable cross-boundary correlations that result from the process of textual weaving I have previously considered in relation to intertextual assimilation. In the previous two chapters I have considered prose intertexts in order to explore and illuminate Lawrence's poetry. In this chapter and the next I will adopt an intra-textual methodology that considers *Last Poems* in relation both to other poems written by Lawrence and to seminal prose texts.

In its application and definition, intra-textuality incurs the same problems as intertextuality, as is evident in Orr's account of the different kinds of intra-textuality operative within and between the writings of Claude Simon.



Orr, in her defining of intra-textuality or 'self-inter-referentiality' (Orr, 1993, p.177), refers to a 'narrative of self-quotation' (Orr, 1993, p.189) which suggests a consciously derivative process (though not one that lacks originality as a consequence):

To re-use one's earlier works may at first sight suggest a paucity of invention, but in fact a greater poetic and associative density of language may be the result in the hands of a skilful practitioner. As is the case with intertextuality (the borrowing from another), self-borrowing indicates the regenerative function of quotation. Previous words, themes and forms are vitalized by other components and combinations, so that new reverberations will occur from these old materials. (Orr, 1993, p.4)

In Orr's conception of self-borrowing as expressed here, the author in question is seen to revert openly to his existing works in order to find 'regenerative reference points': this process involves 'self-quotation' of a kind that Orr feels can revitalize the concept of literary copying or plagiarism. The mention of plagiarism - the most extreme, self-conscious kind of textual borrowing - however, again suggests that Orr is considering a direct, directed kind of self-referentiality, one which is authorially driven/intended, and as a result might be traced using Riffaterrean thread-tracing techniques.

This author-centred approach, however, seems inadequate. Just as Riffaterre contradicts his sense of the authorially-determined texts by his needle-in-a-haystack image, so Orr has to qualify her sense of willed self-quotation and clear correlation within key texts by recognising that in other works the process of textual re-emergence may well be far more indirect:

The latter are never direct re-quotations. As we shall see they are associative, interpretative 'reprises' operating on poetic reverberation and peculiarity of image, rather than on direct, *mise en abyme* recognition. (Orr, 1993, p.181)

The emphasis has shifted, in this formulation, to the linguistic operation of intra-textuality, involving association, interpretation and reverberation rather

than direct citational links. The complexity implied here is also evident in the peculiarly complex imagery employed by Orr to reveal the source of the 'reverberations' to which she has referred:

A set of inter-reflecting and refracting mirrors such as in a telescope or kaleidoscope again underplay the reverberations and echoing waves in this text which are caused by the intrusion of the self as subject obliquely into the narrative space. (Orr, 1993, p.188)<sup>2</sup>

Mirrors not only reflect: they can also distort, disorientate and confuse, through creating odd, unfaithful images. The term 'echoing' too provokes the inevitable 'echo-chamber' association: the image which Barthes employs in order to articulate his conception of intertextual resonance through multiplicity/plurality. The 'self as subject' is here seen as an intruder moving 'obliquely' into the text's space, not establishing control or domination but merely underplaying some of the text's reverberations.

The intra-textual interrelations I will explore in this chapter and the next are not, however, willed or self-conscious: they do not stand in relation to each other as texts that have been consciously joined by their author. The joining has been done retrospectively, and although the intra-texts have been selected on the grounds of chronology of composition and shared preoccupation, I am concerned not with self-quotation but with providing linguistic and semantic contexts in which *Last Poems* can be better understood. It seems to me essential to recognise that intra-texts are subject to an equally complex linguistic 'shaping' process as intertexts. If anything the complexity is greater, as intra-texts have themselves been determined intertextually, so they must be considered in terms of precursive writings both within and beyond the corpus of the author. In this chapter, for instance, I will explore *Last Poems* in relation to Lawrence's correspondence; his travel book *Sketches of Etruscan Places*, written in 1927; and also in relation to the fragment 'A Dream of Life',

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<sup>2</sup> Again the language is odd - even muddled - particularly the use here of the term 'underplay'. It is difficult to conceive how mirrors can 'underplay' (as in 'underlie' or 'play down'?) reverberations and waves.



published as 'Autobiographical Sketch' in *Phoenix*. Yet in so doing I will consider the literary and intertextual contexts underlying the composition of my chosen intra-texts, as well as the biographical events which (at various stages in Lawrence's life) triggered the composition of his Etruscan writings.

*Lawrence in Etruscan places.*

What would I not give  
To bring back the rare and orchid-like  
Evil-yclept Etruscan?  
(Lawrence, 1993a, p.297)<sup>3</sup>

Since 1912-14, Lawrence had been fascinated by the inhabitants, the landscape and the atmosphere of Italy: 'One must love Italy, if one has lived there. It is so non-moral. It leaves the soul so free. Over these countries, Germany and England, like the grey skies, lies the gloom of the dark moral judgement and condemnation and reservation of the people. Italy does not judge' (Lawrence, 1979, p.544). He had lived in Italy and written extensively about it; notably in *Twilight in Italy, Sea and Sardinia* and the poetry volume *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. In *Sea and Sardinia*, written in 1921, Lawrence refers to the 'conscious genus' characterising every part of Italy, which he associated in particular with the early Mediterranean (Etruscan) gods: 'Man has lived there and brought forth his consciousness there and in some way brought that place to consciousness, given it its expression, and, really, finished it. The expression may be Proserpine, or Pan, or even the strange "shrouded" gods of the Etruscans or the Sikels, none the less it is an expression' (see Lawrence, 1985a, p.123).

Lawrence's stay in Italy in 1920 provoked the interest in the Etruscans he displayed in 'Cypresses', a poem published in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. As Simonetta de Filippis says of this poem: 'Written in September 1920 at Fiesole

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<sup>3</sup> From 'Cypresses' in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*.

(Tuscany), it shows clearly how Lawrence had already traced the main elements which he later developed into the more complex and conscious vision offered in *Sketches of Etruscan Places* (Filippis, 1992, p.xxiii). In order to account for the immediate inspiration for Lawrence's writing of this poem, she quotes Rosalind Baynes' recollection that: 'Sometimes [Lawrence] came to Fiesole where I was now living, climbing by a steep track up through the olives and along under the remains of Fiesole's Etruscan walls...It was here several...poems were suggested - "Cypresses," for example' (Nehls, 1958, pp.49-50). Filippis also refers to a letter written by Lawrence to his mother-in-law a year later, in which a physical parallel is once again drawn between the Tuscan cypresses and the Etruscan race:

This is Tuscany, and nowhere are the cypresses so beautiful and proud, like black-flames from primeval times, before the Romans had come, when the Etruscans were still here, slender and fine and still and with naked elegance, black-haired, with narrow feet.

(Lawrence, 1987b, p.84)

The similarities with 'Cypresses' are striking: the trees are 'black-flames' (in the poem they are 'pillars of dark flame'); the Etruscans are 'slender', 'still', 'naked' and 'dark-haired' with 'narrow feet' (suggesting the 'slim', 'naked', 'sensitive-footed' 'quietness' described in the poem). The sense that an Etruscan 'secret' is contained within the cypresses is similarly expressed in a letter written six weeks later to Catherine Carswell, in which Lawrence asks: 'will you tell me *what* then was the secret of the Etruscans, which you saw written so plainly in the place you went to? Please dont forget to tell me, as they really do rather puzzle me, the Etruscans' (Lawrence, 1987b, p.105).

Carswell's visit to Etruria was obviously one source of Lawrence's interest in the Etruscans. Yet Simonetta de Filippis suggests an intertextual interest once again reaching back to Lawrence's youthful reading:



Lawrence's reading in his formative years may have awakened his curiosity in Etruscan culture. In 1908, for instance, as Jessie Chambers recalls, he 'was very impressed by Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin*'. At the beginning of the novel, the hero observes 'an Etruscan vase of finest clay, the nut-brown maiden dancing before the God Priapus, to whom she joyously waved her hand'. In December 1915 Lawrence read *The Golden Bough* and was very much taken by Frazer's account of tree-spirits in chapter IX, 'The Worship of Trees', where central Etruria and its 'rich fields' are mentioned.

(Filippis, 1992, p.xxiii)

In the early intertext by Balzac a named god - Priapus - is brought into conjunction with the shadowy Etruscan race and its unnamed gods, through being depicted on a vase, just as the god Priapus is used to create an image at the end of the poem 'Name the Gods': a poem advocating a refusal to name. The reference to Frazer is significant, showing that the Etruscans were bound up with Lawrence's general interest in primitive peoples, and with the multiple mythologies and races described by Frazer and Tylor. In 'Foreword' to *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Lawrence classes the Etruscans with the rest of the 'pagan world', with Egypt and Greece; with the Druids, Chaldeans, Amerindians and Chinese who all adhered to and taught the 'old wisdom':

I honestly think that the pagan world of which Egypt and Greece were the last living terms, the great pagan world which preceded our own era once, had a vast and perhaps perfect science of its own, a science in terms of life. In our era this science crumbled into magic and charlatanry. But even wisdom crumbles... Then came...the world flood...The refugees...fled...and some, like Druids or Etruscans or Chaldeans or Amerindians or Chinese, refused to forget, but taught the old wisdom, only in its half-forgotten, symbolic forms.

(Lawrence, 1971b, pp.12-13)

At this stage Lawrence classed the Etruscans along with the Greeks, in his assertion that 'We are really far, far more life-stupid than the dead Greeks or the lost Etruscans' (see *Fantasia* chap 7), although later - in *Sketches* - he was to develop a crucial distinction between these two civilisations.

It is unsurprising that Lawrence's return to Florence in 1926 created a resurgence of his interest in the Etruscans. His desire to 'roam round in Umbria for a little while, and look at the Etruscan things, which interest me' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.416) and his first contact with an Etruscan town and museum led to his enthusiastic decision early in April 1926 to write 'a book about Umbria and the Etruscans: half travel-book, scientific too' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.412). This decision led Lawrence to cast around for suitable texts that would provide relevant background and historical information, and he read both widely and thoroughly (in English and Italian) in order to prepare for the visit and for the writing of his book. Lawrence also considered that he might 'stay at Perugia for a couple of months and get material' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.415): presumably historical. When informing Martin Secker of his plans for the Etruscan book, he added a request for literary sources that might be of use:

We might go to Perugia, and I might do a book on Umbria and the Etruscan remains...It would be half a travel book – of the region round Perugia, Assisi, Spoleto, Cortona, and the Maremma – and half a book about the Etruscan things, which interest me very much. - If you happen to know any good book, modern, on Etruscan things, I wish you'd order it for me. I've only read that old work, Dennis' - *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*. (Lawrence, 1989b, p.413)

On 29 April he informed Secker: 'I'm reading Italian books on the Etruscans - very interesting indeed. I'll join Vieusseux's library here - they will have more things' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.444). Subsequently he wrote:

Secker has been urging me to write a travel book: and I don't want to do an ordinary travel book, just of places. So I thought I might stay here [at the Villa Mirenda] two months or so, and prepare a book on the Etruscan cities - the dead Etruscans. It would mean my travelling about a good deal...That would be in June - at present I'm reading the Italian books on the Etruscans, getting the idea into shape.  
(Lawrence, 1989b, p.448-49)



It is interesting that Lawrence employs the term 'shape' here, to describe the intertextual process of producing an 'idea' of the Etruscans from the material provided by his literary sources. He felt this shaping of his ideas and preconceptions to be an obligatory task, even when he was reluctant to apply himself to it: 'At present I am supposed to be reading up about my precious Etruschi!' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.447).

Lawrence appeared to oscillate between enthusiasm for the book and a profound disillusionment regarding his reading public: 'Why write books for the swine, unless one absolutely must!' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.483) and 'Of literary news, I have none. I wanted to write a book on the Etruscans and Etruscan cities - sort of half travel book. But I get such a distaste for committing myself into "solid print," I am holding off. Let the public read what there is to read' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.496). Nevertheless, Lawrence continued to read what there was to read on the Etruscans, and formulated his opinions partly in response to the texts he encountered.

He ranged far beyond George Dennis' book which he may well have read as early as 1920 (Burwell, 1982, p.101) and had certainly read by 1925, as he left a copy in America and had later to request another.<sup>4</sup> He also read a book on the Etruscans by Theodore Familiar Mommsen, perhaps *The Early Inhabitants of Italy*, in May (Burwell, 1982, p.102); Pericle Ducati's *Etruria Antico* in August (Burwell, 1982, p.102); Fritz Weege's *Etruskische Malerei*, borrowed for re-reading in July 1927 (Burwell, 1982, p.104); and D. Randell Marivers' *Villanovans and Early Etruscans*, probably in 1927 (Burwell, 1982, p.105). These specified titles constitute only a small proportion of the books he probably read, as is indicated (for instance) by Aldington's recollection that he had a dozen or so books sent to him in preparation for a visit from Lawrence during the summer of 1926. As late as November 1929, Lawrence was

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<sup>4</sup> See Lawrence's letter to Martin Secker of 29 April 1927 (Lawrence, 1991, p.45).

receiving 'an Etruscan book' along with other unspecified books sent to him by Max Mohr (Burwell, 1982, p.110).

Lawrence engaged in a dialogue with these various sources, not treating them scientifically as material, but using them as a spring-board for his own ideas.<sup>5</sup> He pitted his own sense of the aliveness and physicality of the Etruscans against any negative (and in his view superficial) judgements regarding their worth:

Mommsen hated everything Etruscan, and the germ of all degeneracy was in the race. But the bronzes and terra cottas are fascinating, so alive with physical life, with a powerful physicality which surely is as great, or sacred, ultimately, as the *ideal* of the Greeks and Germans.

(Lawrence, 1989b, pp.464-65)

Filippis describes how Lawrence 'damned with faint praise' Fritz Weege's *Etruskische Malerei* and Pericle Ducati's *Etruria Antica* (Filippis, 1992, p.xxviii). The former 'seemed to interest him only for its reproductions', which he described as 'very interesting indeed', and proceeded to say that 'I got photographs too from Alinari - and on the one from the *Tomba dei Tori*, the two little improper bits, *un poco pornographico*, as brave as life. Amusing!' (Lawrence, 1991, p.50). Weege may have inspired Lawrence's decision to include photographs and illustrations in his own book, something that he came to believe were 'essential for the book's success' (Lawrence, 1989b, p.461); yet Weege's writing itself failed to stimulate him. Filippis asserts that Ducati's book also failed to affect Lawrence profoundly: 'like many books he had already read - he considered neither particularly original nor stimulating' (Filippis, 1992, p.xxviii). She goes on to say that 'Lawrence dismissed the so-called authoritative books on the subject as "dreary, repetition and surmise", partly because their traditional, historical interpretation was based on a

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<sup>5</sup> This is the first time I will have considered such a wide range of texts considered necessary by Lawrence for his own writing as a result of their scholarly insight, revealing something of the care and precision with which Lawrence engaged with such a literary task.



viewpoint so radically different from his own' (Filippis, 1992, p.xxviii). This, in fact, seems an unhelpful summary, because what Lawrence found lacking in the scholars he read was an *idea* about the Etruscans, rather than simply fact:

Many thanks for Fell, his book came a few days ago. He's very thorough in washing out once more the few rags of information we have concerning the Etruscans: but not a thing has he to say. It's really disheartening: I shall just have to start in and go ahead, and be damned to all authorities! There really is next to nothing to be said, *scientifically*, about the Etruscans. Must take the imaginative line.

(Lawrence, 1989b, p.473)

Lawrence's decision to 'be damned to all authorities' and to 'take the imaginative line' is crucial to an understanding of *Sketches*, and also to the intra-textual process by which the Etruscans infiltrate other late texts, such as *Last Poems*, 'A Dream of Life', *The Escaped Cock* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The Etruscan culture appealed to Lawrence because it was enigmatic, and therefore available to poetic or fictional interpretation and manipulation. In the case of the Etruscans, Lawrence felt, the scholars were on unstable ground, so that the imaginative approach would be equally valid, and certainly a good deal more interesting.<sup>6</sup>

### *George Dennis: a congenial intertext.*

There was, however, one source that Lawrence did not choose to reject, in spite of his implicitly denigratory reference to it as 'that old work'. In a letter to Martin Secker of April 29 1927, Lawrence wrote: 'do send me Dennis' *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*. I should like to read it again, and my copy is in America. It's a good book' (Lawrence, 1991, p.45). A study of intertextuality must take into account Lawrence's indebtedness to this particular text. The

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<sup>6</sup> For a fuller biographical account of Lawrence's developing interest in Italy and the Etruscans, see Simonetta de Filippis' 'Introduction' to *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays* (Filippis, 1992, pp.xxi-lxxiii).

Etruscan trip he took was, in one sense, an attempt to follow the path taken by Dennis through Italy, and to use Dennis' book as a guide (perhaps in the way that Lawrence imagined people would use his own travel book in years to come). The places mentioned below appear to have been chosen from among those assigned a chapter in Dennis' book, while a more localised instance of borrowing is suggested by Lawrence following Dennis in his spelling of the town Cerveteri:

What I should most like to do, for the trip, would be to do the western half of the Etruscans - the Rome museums - then Veii and Civita Castellana and Cervet[e]ri - which one does from Rome - then Corneto, just beyond Civita Vecchia in Maremma - then the Maremma coast-line - and Volterra... If there were time, we might get to Chiusi and Orvieto - we could see. I have a real feeling about the Etruscans.

(Lawrence, 1991, pp.649-50)

The 'real feeling' about the Etruscans was in part indebted to Dennis' book, which inspired at least to a degree Lawrence's initial engagement with and attraction to them.

According to Dennis' own claim for his book, it might be thought that he had the same kind of appeal for Lawrence as Tylor. His approach is purportedly factual and unimaginative; he claims to recognise but not exploit the possibility of breathing fresh life into the Etruscan theme:

The object of this work is not to collect the *disjecta membra* of Etruscan history, and form them into a whole, though it were possible to breathe into it fresh spirit and life from the eloquent monuments that recent researches have brought to light; it is not to build up from these monuments any theory on the origin of this singular people, on the character of their language, or on the peculiar nature of their civilization, - it is simply to set before the reader a mass of facts relative to Etruscan remains, and particularly to afford the traveller who would visit the Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria such information as may prove of service, by indicating precisely what is now to be found on each site, whether local monuments, or those portable relics which exist in public museums, or in the hands of private collectors. (Dennis, 1907, p.4)



From this claim it might be assumed that Dennis would strive for factual objectivity; which would introduce an irony into Lawrence's preference for this work, as he rejects other scholarly accounts for being factual and unimaginative. One possible interpretation is that Lawrence read Dennis' book before any of the others, so that the presented facts were fresh, and gave him the opportunity to proceed imaginatively beyond them. Perhaps Lawrence felt that in this way he could breathe fresh life into his subject, as his precursor had refrained from doing.

Another interpretation would be to say that Dennis does not fulfil his aim: that fallacious intentionality is subverted in the writing-process. Dennis' claim for factuality is certainly problematised by the words from the Elder Pliny which he sets out in the Preface to his book as his challenge in writing:

'It is no easy matter to give novelty to old subjects, authority to new, to impart lustre to rusty things, light to the obscure and mysterious, to throw a charm over what is distasteful, to command credence for doubtful matters, to give nature to everything, and to arrange everything according to its nature.' (Dennis, 1907, p.xvi)

The words 'novelty', 'lustre', 'light', 'charm' and 'nature' point to an approach that is predominantly concerned with the aesthetic rather than with facts. Even the desire to 'command credence for doubtful matters' implicitly involves artistic endeavour as well as scholarly knowledge and accuracy. The whole passage asserts the importance of resurrecting a wrongly-neglected old subject, and implies that such a thing can only be achieved through giving 'nature' to things, rather than through reason. In his Introduction to the Italian edition of *Sketches*, Massimo Pallottino refers to Dennis' book as 'the liveliest and most deservedly celebrated yet to have been written on ancient Etruria' (Pallottino, 1994, p.11). The word 'liveliest' implies that its appeal for Lawrence may have had its roots in its energy and imagination, rather than in its wealth of facts.

Dennis' imaginative response to his theme is evident in his desire to 'enter into' the life of the dead race he describes, as he engages in a voluntary

suspension of disbelief in which the Etruscans are seen to be alive in the present:

We can now enter into the inner life of the Etruscans, almost as fully as if they were living and moving before us, instead of having been extinct as a nation for more than two thousand years. We can follow them from the cradle to the tomb... we see them in the bosom of their families, and at the festive board, reclining luxuriously amid the strains of music, and the time-beating feet of dancers -

(Dennis, 1907, p.2)

Dennis seems here to be taking the 'imaginative line', employing language in the interests of evoking and describing, rather than presenting, information. Pallottino even expresses the view that Dennis and Lawrence adopt the same imaginative approach:

The theme of latter-day ethnography, of the *Volkspychologie* of the inhabitants of Tuscany and Northern Latium, is one of the richest and most stimulating in the pages of Dennis and Lawrence, which present an animated kaleidoscope of extremely vivid characters: inn-keepers and landladies, attendants at ancient monuments, impromptu guides, country folk, herdsmen; all of whom also seem at times to merge with the colour of their untamed land. (Pallottino, 1994, p.18)

According to Pallottino, both texts achieve animation and vitality through their imaginative engagement with their subject.

It is easy to identify other ways in which Dennis' book would have appealed to Lawrence. In his admiration for the Etruscans, Dennis redresses the bias evident in writers like Mommsen, who laud the Romans and disparage their so called barbaric predecessors. Such allegations of barbarism are tackled by Dennis in passages such as this, in which the Etruscan civilisation is seen to be disciplined, compassionate, and - significantly - similar to that of the early Greek states:

The government of Etruria in external form bore some resemblance to a federal republic, each of its Twelve States or Cities



having a distinct internal sovereignty, yet combining in a league of amity and mutual assistance - such a confederation, in fact, as existed in early times among the states of Greece. (Dennis, 1907, p.26)

Lawrence follows Dennis in emphasising that each Etruscan state was unique and preserved its integrity and individuality, while simultaneously co-existing with surrounding states and interacting productively. Dennis, however, sees the weakness of such a society when up against a centralised 'modern' society like the Roman. He quotes Niebuhr's assertion that 'the want of a free and respectable commonality—which the Etruscans, obstinately retaining and extending their old feudal system, never allowed to grow up—was the occasion of the singular weakness displayed by the great Etruscan cities in their wars with the Romans' (Dennis, 1907, pp.27-8). Dennis goes along with Niebuhr in seeing this adherence to an old-fashioned hierarchical system as 'primitive' in the pejorative sense: the sense which Lawrence tries to undermine in his writings on primitive culture. Lawrence, conversely, with his sense of a natural hierarchy within humankind, determinable according to native aristocracy of spirit, might well have considered Etruscan feudalism both attractive and advantageous.

Dennis' allegations of Etruscan tyranny are more stringently articulated when he discusses the effects of state control on individual freedom. He asserts that 'it is difficult to conceive of a system of government more calculated to enslave both mind and body than that of the aristocratical augurs and aruspices of Etruria' (Dennis, 1907, p.28). His critique of Etruscan government encompasses both religion and spirituality, which this time he compares unfavourably with that of the Greeks:

The religion of Etruria in her earliest ages bore some resemblance to that of Egypt, but more to the other theological systems of the East. It had the same gloomy, unbending, imperious character, the same impenetrable shroud of mysticism and symbolism; widely unlike the lively, plastic, phantasy-full creed of the Greeks, whose joyous spirit found utterance in song.

(Dennis, 1907, p.28)

Dennis is objecting here to what he presents as the all-pervading mysticism of the religion of the Etruscan people, which he considers unable to exist apart from political systems and philosophical dogmas. He extrapolates from very little evidence to conclude that: 'it was with them a pervading principle - the very atmosphere of her existence - a leaven operating on the entire mass of society - a constant presence ever felt in one form or other - a power admitting no rival, all-ruling, all-regulating, all-requiring' (Dennis, 1907, pp.28-9). To his own satisfaction he proves the power of this religion as 'but negative', as it 'proved ineffectual as a national bond, as an incitement to make common cause against a common foe' (Dennis, 1907, p.29). This may be thought an odd charge to make about a religion; but it contributes to Dennis' presentation of Etruria's 'system of spiritual tyranny', one in particular which rendered Etruria inferior to Greece.

This view is obviously antithetical to that of Lawrence, who, by contrast, emphasises the vivid, liberating nature of the all-pervading religion of the Etruscans, as indicated in particular by the paintings on the tomb walls at Tarquinia. Such disagreements arise from the fact that both writers are clearly creating their own Etruria: they are myth-making, interpreting according to their own perception of history, and their own literary purposes and agendas. Dennis was crucial for Lawrence in offering one version of what the Etruscans might have been. Lawrence's reinterpretation would merely offer another perspective, and forge another link in the intertextual chain.

### ***The romance of Etruria: an intertextual lineage.***

In his introduction to the 1986 Italian edition of *Etruscan Places*, Pallottino discusses the 'poetic' conception of the Etruscans, in relation both to an intertextual lineage and a wider cultural phenomenon. In this edition he includes an essay by Giovanni Kezich entitled 'Lawrence in Etruria: *Etruscan*



*Places in context*', in which Kezich explores the intertextual and other origins of Lawrence's book.

The 'poetic' conception of the Etruscans originates, in Pallotino's view, in a tradition born in the early 19th century, at the time when the great excavations of the Etruscan metropolises took place:

The Romance of Etruria begins at this point, with fanciful broodings over its landscapes, its ruins, its history and its mystery. Certain basic themes are established, certain favoured motifs upon which modern literature will muse and embroider.  
(Pallottino, 1994, p.15)

He identifies a poetic tradition - one of the 'writers' Etruria' - in which the 'extraordinary vision' (again suggesting subjectivity and artistic licence) was handed down in a kind of intertextual chain from Dennis to Lawrence to Huxley. Kezich goes further and argues that the Romantic writers' Etruria - this intertextual chain - is identifiable with a larger 'Etruscan quest', which he conceives both historically and textually: it is a quest for the essence of Italy. In Kezich's view this 'quest' has its origins in the writings of Thomas Dempster, 'author of the seven Latin volumes of *De Etruria Regali*, published in Pisa in 1616 and 1619 and rediscovered in Rome a century later by Sir Thomas Coke' (Kezich, 1994, p.167). Kezich goes on to describe how the quest then became a 'fixed point' within the English culture in Italy: 'a kind of baton handed down from one generation to the next of the English literary community resident in Italy' (Kezich, 1994, p.167). In this literary progression, Etruscan culture is seen by the English as 'a deep-seated substratum, untouched by a succession of imposed dominions': it is the epitome of 'original Italy' (Kezich, 1994, p.167). Having established Dempster as the literary originator, Kezich proceeds to chart other 'decisive points'. These include the Etruscan travels of Mrs. Hamilton Gray (*Tour of the Sepulchres of Etruria*, 1839); George Dennis' *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1848); Richard Burton's *Etruscan Bologna: A Study* (1876) and Frederick Seymour's *Up Hill and Down Dale in Ancient*

*Etruria* (1910). Lawrence's book, for Kezich, was the culmination of this literary tradition:

In *Etruscan Places*, the English cult of Etruria reaches its literary acme: in the tomb paintings of Tarquinia and the urns of Volterra as described by Lawrence, we seem to reach the fulfilment of the dream which had inspired Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1848) or James Frazer's researches, the quest to discern, through the forms of the classic imagination, a vital content qualitatively different from that of Rome's triumphant imperial hegemony.

(Kezich, 1994, p.168)

Lawrence's book thus continues the English cult of Etruria and sets it in the light of a Romanticism that, in Pallottino's terms, 'crystallizes, transmits and transforms into a poetic truth the emotions experienced by modern humanity when confronted with the revelation of a new face of the ancient world'. The term 'poetic truth' is both significant and deceptive: it emphasises that the 'writers' Etruria' operates through intuition and imagination, yet suggests (erroneously) that the product of their investigative mode can be in some way definitive.

Pallottino identifies the specifically Etruscan poetic tradition with a common (not merely literary) tradition of wilful and stubborn adherence to a belief in the enigmatic riddle of the Etruscans. He emphasises the singularity (and, as he sees it, the absurdity) of this situation in relation to Etruscan mythology, referring to the 'daft cleavage between what has been scientifically ascertained and the unshakeable beliefs of the public' (Pallottino, 1994, p.13):

The public at large gets passionately involved, it goes from the hot douche of enthusiasm to the cold douche of disillusionment, but still 'loves' its Etruscans. People have formed their own image of them, made them almost into a legend, or a series of legends, often quite at variance with what has been factually ascertained, sustained rather by the reflections of the imaginative writer. These legends, in essence, fulfil the need for escapist fantasy-activity and keep alive a sense of mystery. Even when the haze of mystery shows signs of lifting, our imaginative contemporary steadfastly withholds all belief...

(Pallottino, 1994, p.12)



The Romantic poetic Etruscan tradition may be defined as an extension of the public stance, in which 'love' for the Etruscans is the overriding impulse, and writers have 'formed their own image of them'. The public view has thus been 'sustained by the imaginative writer', who takes the imaginative approach to its logical conclusion. The 'writers' Etruria' to Pallottino, 'now follows the flight of pure fantasy: from interpretation it has turned into transfiguration, from transfiguration into symbol, from symbol into paradox' (Pallottino, 1994, p.22). The implication is that Lawrence's book, the 'literary acme' of this tradition, and a book that professes to 'take the imaginative line', is a product of 'pure fantasy'. This view trivialises the process of acute observation and scholarly investigation that was crucial to the writing of *Sketches*, in foolishly equating an 'imaginative line' with 'pure fantasy'.

Pallottino seems above all worried that modern English writers have 'transfigured' historical Etruria 'into the idea of a lost world, happy by nature, impetuously alive with spontaneous physical life, untrammelled by reason or morality: a world, precisely, which was progressively stifled down the century by reason and morality, to the misfortune of mankind' (Pallottino, p.20). To him, this is all simply personal and escapist: 'this particular experience consists not so much in the discovery of the Etruscan as in the discovery of the writer's own mind, with his ideals, his sympathies, his passions, his rages' (Pallottino, 1994, p.24). Writing is thus reduced to an absurd mixture of the personal and the romantic:

Etruria is a mere pretext for self-revelation: favourable terrain for the burgeoning of poetic flora as the mood of the times and the temper of the mind dictate. So in Dennis's Etruria there unfolds and finds expression a wanderer's Romanticism, cultured and inquisitive, with just a dash of humour; in Carducci's, a heroic Romanticism, nurtured on history; in Lawrence's and Huxley's, a paradoxical and astringent symbolism which, via the Atlantis myth of a lost world, attempts to embody the escapist impulse of our own restless era.

(Pallottino, 1994, p.24)

Pallottino is suggesting that Etruria - for Lawrence, and for everyone else - serves egotistical ends: that the Etruscans are appropriate for this task simply because of our lack of empirical evidence (or acknowledged empirical evidence). He cannot conceive that a writer might not be self-indulgent in such a situation but actually try to recreate something important to the modern world.

However, Pallottino's view has been current since Richard Aldington wrote, in his 1932 'Introduction' to *Apocalypse*,

The Etruscans were quite a godsend. Here was a lost European civilisation which had never been guilty of a Homer or a Plato, and had indeed no extant literature at all. There is no history of the Etruscans, for the book about them by the Emperor Claudius has disappeared, and the dislike of the Romans for a conquered and perhaps more civilised people, added to Christian horror of 'pagans', has left us little but archeology and conjecture.

(Aldington, 1932, pp.xxvi-vii)

This conception of the Etruscans, in which they simply provide raw material for a writer, is echoed in a review by T.E. Welby entitled 'Lawrence's Etruria', written for the *Observer* in October 1932. He too finds that it is Lawrence's own disordered mind which led to this 'desperate' personal search:

the affair here is clearly less one of what Etruria was than of what a very modern and disordered man of genius took it to have been in his desperate search for a civilization untroubled by the intellect.

(Welby, 1932, p.7)

The Etruscan race is thus made to form merely another link in Lawrence's own personal chain of idealised mythologies, as a successor for example to his version of the American Indians. In another contemporary review which emphasises what it sees as the unashamed and slightly absurd subjectivism of the book, *Sketches* is described using terms such as 'vivid', 'strange', 'penetrating' and 'charm[ing]' (like Dennis's book), and the reviewer asserts that '[Lawrence] mixes knowledge, presumption and wild conjecture into a



phantasmagoric but sharply distinctive whole' (*New Statesman and Nation*, 22 October 1932, pp.490-92). Again the phrase 'wild conjecture' is wholly reductive, suggesting an approach which ignores or remains ignorant of empirical expertise. Pallottino, in another generalisation, asserts quite wrongly that 'Every page by Lawrence exudes impatience and contempt for the scientists, those obtuse and prosaic prophaners of a poetic word they cannot understand' (Pallottino, 1994, p.23). Pallottino uses as 'evidence' for this remark Lawrence's expressed desire for a 'contact' with the past, rather than a theory or thesis arising from 'object-lessons about vanished races' (Pallottino, p.24). Yet Lawrence's approach seems neither contemptuous nor impatient: it merely offers an alternative mode of investigation, which seeks imaginative rather than empirical 'truth': and it is devoted not to his own needs but to the needs of his culture as a whole.

*Return of the Etruscans: two early poetic intra-texts.*

Literally, the Etruscans may be said to have 'returned' to inhabit Lawrence's 1928-30 creative writing. Figuratively, they may be said to underlie the actual 'return' described in the 'mythological' poems at the very start of the 'Last Poems' notebook. It may seem paradoxical to assert that the poem which begins the notebook - 'The Greeks are Coming!' - has any reference to the Etruscans. Yet, as I have previously suggested, Lawrence takes 'hints' from diverse cultural and mythological writings, amalgamating all sorts of unnamed gods, and allowing the named Olympians to remain fluid, so they can retain their pre-Homeric characteristics. In this way the Olympians of 'Last Poems' have Greek names, yet seem to possess some of the key attributes that Lawrence derived from the culture he believed in many ways to be superior to Greece: that of the Etruscans.

The co-existence of Greek and Etruscan cultures in Lawrence's thinking is evident on juxtaposition of the poems 'Sicilian Cyclamens' and

'Cypresses'. Significantly, these two poems are sufficiently close to each other in the *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* verse-book to suggest a co-existence rather than contradiction between the Etruscan and Greek (more generally pagan) mythologies. In 'Sicilian Cyclamens', the marble fosters the roots of the cyclamens long before it is turned into a Parthenon frieze in the high Classical period; just as in 'Cypresses' the 'dark thought' or 'secret' of the Etruscans is enwombed in the trees, sustaining them:

Greece, and the world's morning  
Where all the Parthenon marbles still fostered the roots of the cyclamen.  
Violets  
Pagan, rosy-muzzled violets...  
(Lawrence, 1993a, p.311)

The violets are described as 'pagan', again suggesting that the dead or superseded race that provides sustenance for these flowers has implications beyond a specific identity.

This Greek/Etruscan correlation is retained in the 1928-30 poems. As I have noted, the poetry that begins 'Last Poems' is concerned with the imagined return of Olympian deities: yet this poetry is concerned with gods of *Tiryns* (i.e. Etruscan gods) as well as Minos. A consideration of these gods/heroes in relation to those of the 1920 poem 'Cypresses' reveals an extraordinary similarity to Lawrence's earlier descriptions of the Etruscans. In 'Middle of the World' the 'return' of the mythological protagonists is described as follows:

I see descending from the ships at dawn  
slim naked men from Cnossos, smiling the archaic smile  
of those that will without fail come back again,  
and kindling little fires upon the shores  
and crouching, and speaking the music of lost languages.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.2; 1993a, p.688)

The Etruscans of 'Cypresses' too are described as 'subtly-smiling': 'The smile, the subtle Etruscan smile still lurking / Within the tombs'. They are also referred to as 'Going with insidious, half-smiling quietness / And some of



Africa's imperturbable sang-froid / About a forgotten business'. They come over the sea from a distance and their 'quietness' is interpretable perhaps with reference to Lawrence's term 'insouciance'. The term 'forgotten' is significant: the Etruscan civilisation has been forgotten by us, and is also forgotten by the Etruscans, who perform actions according to the dictates of the blood, through intuition rather than controlled intellect. Quietness of this kind suggests a concept of archaism in which men - like the 'slim naked men from Cnossos' - 'slimly went like fishes, and didn't care' (Lawrence, MS2, p.3; 1993a, p.688).

In their easy physicality and insouciance, the Etruscans of 'Cypresses' bear a good deal of resemblance to the mythological protagonists of the 1928-30 poems, who are identifiable by their laughter rather than by words:

So now they come back! Hark!  
Hark! the low and shattering laughter of bearded men  
with the slim waists of warriors, and the long feet  
of moon-lit dancers...

They are dancing! they return, as they went, dancing!  
For the thing that is done without the glowing as of god, vermillion,  
were best not done at all.  
How glistening red they are!

(Lawrence, MS2, p.3; 1993a, pp.688-89)

Despite being 'slim-waist[ed] warriors' these men are characterised by the 'long feet' belonging to dancers. In 'Cypresses' the Etruscans are 'slender, tender-footed / Long-nosed men of Etruria'; they are also 'sensitive-footed' and 'Naked except for fanciful long shoes'. Their dancing is made indicative of the blood-being that distinguishes the rhythms of instinct from the deliberate action of intellect: they act according to the 'Dusky, slim marrow-thought of slender, flickering men of Etruria'. The words 'flickering' and 'flicker' are conspicuous in the 'More Pansies' poem 'Be it So' to describe a moment in which 'the gods' are made manifest in a human being: 'O, if a flame is in you, be it so! / When your flame flickers up, and you flicker forth in sheer purity' (Lawrence, MS1, p.56); 1993a, p.674). Similarly, the poem 'Two Ways of

Living and Dying' describes 'that purity / that flickered forth in the best hours of life, / when the man was himself, so a god in his singleness' (Lawrence, MS1, p.58; 1993a, p.676) while 'Conceit' ends with the lines: 'Now let me be myself, / now let me be myself, and flicker forth, / now let me be myself, in the being, one of the gods' (Lawrence, MS1, p.57; 1993a, p.674). The term 'flickering' suggests the kind of transience that Lawrence associates with the flower-like wooden cities of the Etruscans, in contrast with the 'ponderous erections' made of stone left by more ostentatious, self-conscious peoples.

The physicality of the Etruscans is indistinguishable in 'Cypresses' from their mental processes, as is evident in the phrase 'Dusky, slim marrow-thought' as well as 'one old slim imperishable thought'. They are also associated with 'a dark thought / For which the language is lost'; which relates to the 'music of lost languages' spoken by the crouching men from Cnossos in 'Middle of the World'. In 'Cypresses' the mystery resulting from the loss of the Etruscan language facilitates a critique of the contemporary in which the implicit values of our language are questioned - 'are our words no good?' - and:

Nay, tongues are dead, and words are hollow as hollow seed-pods,  
Having shed their sound and finished all their echoing  
Etruscan syllables,  
That had the telling.

(Lawrence, 1993a, p.296)

Modern language may 'echo' Etruscan language, but it doesn't have 'the telling': the Word employed by the modern world is hollow, lacking the 'sound' that can create resonance beyond meaning. In contrast with verbal communication, the narrator of 'A Dream of Life' is able to understand the language of the Newthorpe inhabitants as a dog hears and understands, and is unreliant on the semantic implications of words: 'He said it again, softly and calmly, speaking to the inside of me, so that I understood from the voice, not from the words' (Lawrence, 1936, p.828).



In 'Cypresses', the notion of evil becomes untrustworthy because of the way in which a conqueror's language of good and bad has replaced all other languages:

For as to the evil  
We have only Roman word for it,  
Which I, being a little weary of Roman virtue,  
Don't hang much weight on.  
(Lawrence, 1993a, p.297)

The ludicrous attribution of evil or viciousness to the Etruscans is suggested when Lawrence makes even their cypress trees 'Vicious dark cypresses':

Vicious, you supple, brooding, softly-swaying pillars of dark flame.  
Monumental to a dead, dead race...  
(Lawrence, 1993a, p.297)

The incongruity achieved here through the juxtaposition of the term vicious with the vivid description of the cypresses' beauty creates a similar effect to the question 'Is the gentian savage, on her tall stem?' (Lawrence, MS1, p.66; 1993a, p.684): both invite a redefinition of the key term ('savage'/'vicious') involved in the process of cultural determinism. It seems absurd to ascribe such human attributes as savagery and viciousness to a gentian flower or a cypress tree; and by poetic extension it becomes ludicrous to refer in this way to the dead, lost Etruscan race. An incongruity is further evident in Lawrence's description of the 'slender, flickering men of Etruria, / Whom Rome called vicious', provoking a reversal in which viciousness is attributed not to the Etruscans but to the Roman race which destroyed them:

There is only one evil, to deny life  
As Rome denied Etruria  
And mechanical America Montezuma still.  
(Lawrence, 1993a, p.298)

Montezuma, of course, was (and is) frequently represented as a monster of evil tyranny. A modern analogy is used in order to suggest that the Etruscan 'delicate magic of life' has been lost and never yet regained - it is still buried - for modernity is still intent on the same repression that characterised the Roman subjugation of the Etruscan race. In *Sketches* Lawrence's championing of the Etruscans against the Romans is expanded and treated with greater urgency and conviction, perhaps in response to the political situation of Italy in 1928, in which the country was increasingly dominated by a repressive fascist state.

The poetry argues, therefore, that the meaning of life has been lost, and as a consequence advocates an imaginative 'return'; it articulates the need to 'invoke spirits' in order to infuse 'meaning back into life again':

They say the fit survive,  
But I invoke the spirits of the lost.  
Those that have not survived, the darkly lost,  
To bring their meaning back into life again,  
Which they have taken away  
and wrapped inviolable in soft cypress-trees,  
Etruscan cypresses.

(Lawrence, 1993a, p.298)

Yet this 1920 poem offers no clear explanation of the way in which such an invocation might be made: the Etruscan secret remains 'wrapped inviolable' in the cypress-trees. Given this early fascination, however, it is unsurprising that after his visit to Etruria in April 1927 and his writing of the travel book *Sketches* in the succeeding months, Lawrence used Etruscan culture to bring a new layer of meaning into his poetry of 1928-30. The Etruscans had grown to occupy a crucial role in his writing of the twenties; his language referred back to his own early work but with a different context and a new kind of urgency.



*A prose intra-text: Etruscan arrival and origins.*

Having considered the 1920 poem 'Cypresses', I will now introduce relevant passages from the 1927 prose intra-text *Sketches*. This is not done with the purpose of establishing fixed linear progressions, in which prose feeds unambiguously into specific lines and images in the later poems. Rather, the prose intra-text offers one linguistic/semantic context that helps to substantiate my claim for an 'Etruscan' element within these late poems.

In *Sketches*, for instance, Lawrence describes the way in which Etruscan ships sailed the Mediterranean basin, from numerous destinations. He acknowledges that the Etruscans may originally have come from Greece and Sicily:

this is the Tyrrhenian sea of the Etruscans, where their shipping spread sharp sails, and beat the sea with slave-oars, roving in from Greece and Sicily, Sicily of the Greek tyrants; from Cumae, the city of the old Greek colony of Campagnia, where the province of Naples now is, and from Elba, where the Etruscans mined their iron ore. The Etruscans sailed the seas. (Lawrence, 1992c, pp.25-26)

The sailing of the seas by the Etruscans is attributed to the spirit of 'restlessness' that 'seems to have some possessed the Mediterranean basin' so that 'ancient races began shaking ships like seeds over the sea. More people than Greeks, or Hellenes, or Indo-Germanic groups, were on the move' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.26). The seed image is striking, and in keeping with Lawrence's association of the Etruscans in particular with 'floweriness' and germination, which in turn relates to his sense of the Etruscan villages as transient: made of wood and therefore disintegrating as a flower grows and dies.

The proliferation of ships suggested by the random seed-shaking is echoed in the line 'And every time, it is ships, it is ships,/ it is ships' in 'The Greeks are Coming!'. In the subsequent poems 'The Argonauts', the ships are

specifically 'Odysseus' ships'. But Odysseus, and the other gods, form merely a part of a continuum of journeying, among all the restless races that set sail in ancient times for Italy:

Probably ships did come - even before Ulysses. Probably men landed on the strange flat coast, and made camps, and then treated with the natives. Whether the newcomers were Lydians or Hittites with hair curled in a roll behind, or men from Mycenae or Crete, who knows. Perhaps men of all these sorts came in batches.

(Lawrence, 1992c, p.26)

The phrase 'men of all these sorts' when compared with 'all sorts of gods' (in the poem with the title, and elsewhere in 'More Pansies') suggests how the 'heroes' of 'Last Poems' are an amalgam of disparate races, deriving from diverse mythologies; both preserving and forfeiting specific mythological attributes and associations according to the poet's will. Certainly the men who come in batches and are seen 'descending from the ships at dawn' and in later poems are seen treating with the natives, with suitably respectful albeit quiet interaction, bear enough resemblance to the Etruscan voyagers described in *Sketches* to demonstrate their common poetic or symbolic (if not physical) origin.

In 'The Greeks are Coming!' the voyagers arrive in 'ships of Cnossos' and also 'Aegean ships', that have come out of 'the eastern end'. This suggestion of Eastern origin may be related to the passages in *Sketches* in which Lawrence engages with the debate over the Etruscan origins which has puzzled Etruscologists. Dennis' conclusion is:

It would take too long to record all the opinions and shades of opinion held on this intricate subject. Suffice it to say that the origin of the Etruscans has been assigned to the Greeks—to the Egyptians—the Phoenicians—the Canaanites—the Libyans—the Cantabrians or Basques—the Celts, an old and favourite theory, revived in our own days by Sir William Betham, who fraternizes them with his pets, the Irish - and lastly, to the Hyksos, or Shepherd-Kings of Egypt.

(Dennis, 1907, p.16)



In spite of the scholarly debate regarding Etruscan origins, Dennis himself adheres to the 'ancient tradition' which asserts their oriental derivation. He refers to the 'oriental character of the civil and religious polity, the social and domestic manners' (Dennis, 1907, p.18); to the 'oriental origin' of the 'divination and augury for which the Etruscans were renowned (Dennis, 1907, p.19); to the 'evidence of extant monuments [which] seems to point to a close analogy between the Etruscan religious creed and those of oriental nations' (Dennis, 1907, p.19); to the 'doctrine of good and evil spirits attendant on the soul' which 'favours the supposition that they held the dualistic principle of oriental creeds' (Dennis, 1907, p.20); and to the observation that 'Their luxurious habits were so strictly oriental, that almost the same language is used in describing them and those of the Lydians' (Dennis, 1907, p.21).

Lawrence, responding in part to the debate as expounded by Dennis and in part relying on intuition, formulates a tentative explanation. While resolving that Italy must already have been inhabited when the newcomers arrived, he asserts that:

The newcomers, whether they were few or many, seem to have come from the east, Asia Minor or Crete or Cyprus. They were, we must feel, of an old, primitive Mediterranean and Asiatic or Aegean stock. The twilight of the beginning of our history was the nightfall of some previous history, which will never be written. Pelasgian is but a shadow-word. But Hittite and Minoan, Lydian, Carian, Etruscan, these words emerge from shadow, and perhaps from one and the same great shadow come the peoples to whom the names belong.<sup>7</sup>

(Lawrence, 1992c, pp.26-27)

The suggestion of Aegean origin in 'The Greeks are Coming!', the specific reference to the 'Minoan distance' in 'Middle of the World' and the mention of the 'eastern end' all contribute to the supposition that the 'Last Poems' heroes

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence used his 'shadow word' in 'Pelasgic faces uncovered', in the 1920 poem 'Sicilian Cyclamens'.

are emerging from one and the same great shadow from which the Etruscans of *Sketches* and 'A Dream of Life' have emerged.

Yet when reflecting on the title of the poem 'The Greeks are Coming!', the following passage from *Sketches* may offer a slightly different interpretation of the way in which the mythological poems relate to the coming of the Etruscans to Italy:

But whether little ships were run ashore on the soft, deep, grey-black volcanic sand of this coast, three thousand years ago, and earlier, their mariners certainly did not find those hills inland empty of people...Even before the fall of Troy, before even Athens was dreamed of, there were natives here. And they had huts on the hills, thatched huts in clumsy groups most probably; with patches of grain, and flocks of goats and probably cattle. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.26)

The men arriving in 'Last Poems' are arriving and stepping into the midst of a culture described by Lawrence as pre-existing. Just as the Etruscans come in their ships and find someone already there, so the slim naked men from Cnossos discover the 'already-there' society of Minoan gods and the Gods of Tiryns 'softly laughing and chatting, as ever' (Lawrence, MS2, p.2; 1993a, p.688). The attitude of the newcomers, the strangers, is purely respectful: and men and gods interact amicably, as is emphasised by the poem in which Dionysos - 'young and a stranger' - leans on a gate, listening to the soft talking and laughing 'in all respect'. In this way of thinking, then, Lawrence uses his imagined landing of the Etruscans as a model for the return of the gods and heroes, with their Greek names, described in the mythological poems.

A final passage may have some bearing on the significance of an ostensibly Greek return, but one in which the Etruscans are implicated. This passage suggests that it is only after the coming of the Greeks that the silent Etruscans can be articulated, and revealed to the world:



Then, as the Greeks came crowding into colonies in Italy, and the Phoenicians began to exploit the western Mediterranean, we begin to hear of the silent Etruscans, and to see them.

(Lawrence, 1992c, p.28)

Perhaps the Greek names used in the poems imply a moment of discovery in which an entire past civilisation is brought to light and life, resulting in an interaction characterised by mutual respect rather than the exploitation evident in the Roman response to their predecessors.

While Lawrence is at times merging and amalgamating disparate gods and religions (such as the Etruscan and the Greek), in *Sketches* he is also concerned with highlighting the distinction between the 'floweriness' of the Etruscan way of life, and the more ostensibly impressive art and culture of the Greeks who succeeded them:

[The ease and friendliness of the tombs] must be partly owing to the peculiar charm of natural proportion which is in all Etruscan things of the unspoilt, unromanticised centuries...The Greeks sought to make an impression, and Gothic still more seeks to impress the mind. The Etruscans, no. The things they did, in their easy centuries, are as natural and as easy as breathing. They leave the breast breathing freely and pleasantly, with a certain fullness of life. Even the tombs. And that is the true Etruscan quality: ease, naturalness, and an abundance of life, no need to force the mind or the soul in any direction. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.19)

The 'breast breathing freely and pleasantly' provoked by contact with the Etruscan artefacts is perhaps the antithesis of the 'impression' made by the grecian urn described by Keats, which leaves the heart 'high-sorrowful and cloyed', and provokes 'a burning forehead and a parching tongue'. The Etruscan carelessness is equated with fullness of life - an abundance of vitality - and may be identified even in the 'little sentences freely written in red paint or black, or scratched in the stucco with the finger, slanting with the real Etruscan carelessness and fullness of life, often running downwards, written from right to left...debonair inscriptions' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.18). The same abundance

of vitality is evident in their 'small temples, like little houses with pointed roofs':

the upper part of the temple would seem almost made of earthenware, terra-cotta plaques fitted neatly, and alive with freely modelled painted figures in relief, gay dancing creatures, rows of ducks, round faces like the sun, and faces grinning and putting out a tongue, all vivid and fresh and unimposing. The whole thing small and dainty in proportion, and fresh, somehow charming instead of impressive. (Lawrence, 1992c, pp.32-33)

Significantly, Lawrence makes a link between these temples and those of the 'early Greeks', which evidently escape being 'ponderous' like the later Grecian and Roman artefacts:

Myself, I like to think of the little wooden temples of the early Greeks and of the Etruscans: small, dainty, fragile, and evanescent as flowers. We have reached the stage when we weary of huge stone erections, and we begin to realise that it is better to keep life fluid and changing than to try to hold it fast down in heavy monuments. Burdens on the face of the earth are man's ponderous erections. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.32)

There is humour in this distinction, when it is considered that some of the few surviving relics of the Etruscans are literally 'stone erections': i.e. the variously sized phallic symbols of stone that were placed at the entrance of every tomb. Yet these stones, with their intimate connection with procreation and regeneration are utterly different from the 'huge stone erections' (for instance the buildings of the Parthenon) which characterise later Grecian art. Lawrence expresses his desire for 'things that are alive and flexible, which won't last too long and become an obstruction and a weariness' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.33): the flower growing out of the marble is a more satisfying image than the marble of the marvellous building.



*Flowers, seeds and images of seasonal regeneration.*

By contrast with the 'ponderous erections' of the (later) Greeks, Lawrence argues that the Etruscans built using wood:

the Etruscans built everything of wood - houses, temples - all save fortifications, great gates, bridges, and drainage works. So that the Etruscan cities vanished as completely as flowers. Only the tombs, the bulbs, were underground. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.13)

Lawrence sees the transience of these wooden buildings as refreshing, and he employs an analogy of the cyclic seasonal pattern of birth, death and rebirth or renewal that is characteristic of the animate universe:

Brute force crushes many plants. Yet the plants rise again...  
The Etruscan element is like the grass of the field and the sprouting of corn, in Italy: it will always be so. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.36)

Such seasonal regeneration also underlies the recurrent conceptualising of rebirth in *Last Poems*: as in 'Shadows', in which the poet-narrator's desire is to 'sink in good oblivion,/ and in the morning wake like a new-opened flower'. Autumnal dissolution is envisaged in this poem as a precursor to regeneration, through an adherence to the seasonal cycle:

then I shall know that my life is moving still  
with the dark earth, and drenched  
with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.30; 1993a, p.727)

The transient 'snatches' of renewal are described as 'odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers / such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me-' (Lawrence, MS1, p.30; 1993a, p.727), imagery which in turn relates this poem to the 'More Pansies' poem 'Gladness of Death':

I have always wanted to be as the flowers are  
so unhampered in their living and dying,  
and in death I believe I shall be as the flowers are.

I shall blossom like a dark pansy, and be delighted  
there among the dark sun-rays of death.  
I can feel myself unfolding in the dark sunshine of death  
to something flowery and fulfilled, and with a strange sweet perfume.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.58; 1993a, p.677)

In the previous chapter I discussed some anthropological origins for Lawrence's concept of 'floweriness'. Yet it may be further illuminated by considering its specific application to the Etruscans. 'Floweriness' is applied to the architecture, to emphasise its fleeting and organic nature, the Etruscan ships are said to be shaken 'like seeds' over the sea, while 'the dead lie buried and quick, as seeds, in their painted houses underground' (Lawrence, 1992c, 33-4). Generally, Etruscan civilisation is made 'a shoot, perhaps the last, from the prehistoric Mediterranean world' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.27).

Also, Lawrence describes the way in which 'the vases and dishes of the Etruscans, especially many of the black bucchero ware, begin to open out like strange flowers, black flowers with all the softness and the rebellion of life against convention, or red-and-black flowers painted with amusing free, bold designs' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.39): a description strongly reminiscent of the 'odd...yet new, strange flowers' referred to in 'Shadows'. This description of the bucchero ware is used to facilitate the comparison between the 'elegant convention' of the Greek vase or urn as 'still-unravished bride of quietness', and 'the naturalness verging on the commonplace, but usually missing it' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.39), which results in the 'bold' Etruscan 'originality'.

In another analogous formulation, Lawrence contrasts the 'uplift' provided by Greek and Gothic art with the 'odd spontaneous forms' of the Etruscans (Lawrence, 1992c, p.39). This highlights a further implication of the



transient nature of living art, which had informed Lawrence's views on his own poetry expressed in the 'Foreword' to *Pansies*:

Anyhow I offer a bunch of pansies, not a wreath of immortelles. I don't want everlasting flowers, and I don't want to offer them to anybody else. A flower passes, and that perhaps is the best of it. If we can take it in its transience, its breath, its maybe mephistophelian, maybe palely ophelian face, the look it gives, the gesture of its full bloom, and the way it turns upon us to depart - that was the flower, we have had it, and no immortelle can give us anything in comparison. The same with the pansy poems; merely the breath of the moment, and one eternal moment easily contradicting the next eternal moment. (Lawrence, 1992a, pp.290-91)

Etruscan remains are 'as natural and as easy as breathing'; pansy poems have (ideally) the same ease and are equally 'the breath of the moment'. Clearly this is an odd argument for a book of poems, which achieves immortality through publication, and occupies a fixed position within Lawrence's own corpus: it is perhaps better understood in relation to the individual poem, and to an essay like 'Poetry of the Present'. Literary (Etruscan-like) 'floweriness' seems to relate to the 'spontaneity' identified by Lawrence in Whitman's 'poetry of the present'. The former is characterised by the 'quick ripple of life' and the latter by strands that are 'all flying, quivering':

The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished. Herein lies its transcendent loveliness...A water-lily heaves herself from the flood, looks round, gleams, and is gone. We have seen the incarnation, the quick of the ever-swirling flood. (Lawrence, 1992a, p.267)

This language could appropriately have been applied to the dancers depicted on the walls of the Tarquinian tombs, as Lawrence perceived them: figures that have become half-obliterated by the passage of time, but preserve the 'gleam' of life that the Etruscan race possessed and portrayed in their paintings.

*Life in death: the tombs at Tarquinia.*

Lawrence employs key scenes and images taken from the tomb walls at Tarquinia in his analysis of the customs, lives and deaths of the Etruscans. According to his interpretation, the vital Etruscan dancing in life is paralleled by festivities that take place after death, which is consequently presented as a 'continuance':

And death, to the Etruscan, was a pleasant continuance of life, with jewels and wine and flutes playing for the dance. It was neither an ecstasy of bliss, a heaven, nor a purgatory of torment. It was just a natural continuance of the fullness of life. Everything was in terms of life, of living. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.19)

The typical Etruscan terms such as 'ease', 'naturalness' and 'spontaneity', as well as the 'free-breathing' sensation experienced by the observer of Etruscan things are applied specifically to a visitor's experience of the tombs:

The tombs seem so easy and friendly, cut out of rock underground. One does not feel oppressed, descending into them...There is a simplicity, combined with a most peculiar, free-breasted naturalness and spontaneity, in the shapes and movements of the underworld walls and spaces, that at once reassures the spirit.

(Lawrence, 1992c, p.19)

The 'naturalness' of the tombs is seen as a consequence of the acceptance of death: something envisaged by Lawrence as one of the most attractive features of the Etruscan civilisation. Dennis refers to 'the great reverence for the dead, which the Etruscans possessed in common with the other nations of antiquity', and asserts that it was this reverence that prompted them 'to store their tombs with these rich and varied sepulchral treasures, which unveil to us the *arcana* of their inner life' (Dennis, 1907, p.3). Lawrence would probably have differed in believing that the Etruscan 'reverence for the dead' was a distinct and distinguishing attribute, rather than merely symptomatic of a 'common' trend



(although he might have classed them with the Egyptians in this respect). In fact, it is important to emphasise both that Lawrence learned from Dennis and that he differed from him profoundly in his assessment of the tombs' contents: it was the acceptance of death rather than the sculptural treasures that mattered to Lawrence.

The reverence and affection for the dead was, in Lawrence's conception, reflected in the Etruscan landscape, in which the acropolis and necropolis would co-exist on parallel hills, so that the living could look easily across:

And within the walls they liked to have one inner high place, the arx, the citadel. Then outside they liked to have a sharp dip or ravine, with a parallel hill opposite. And on the parallel hill opposite they liked to have their city of the dead, the necropolis. So they could stand on their ramparts and look over the hollow where the stream flowed among its bushes, across from the city of life, gay with its painted houses and temples, to the near-at-hand city of their dear dead, pleasant with its smooth walls and stone symbols, and painted fronts.

(Lawrence, 1992c, pp.13-14)

The term 'dear' creates the sense of closeness and affection: it suggests a reciprocity and touch that normally characterises relationships between living human beings. The necropolis is envisaged as much as a 'city' as the acropolis, and is described as 'pleasant' (suggesting simplicity and ease) rather than sad or oppressive. Lawrence sees the tombs in a way that stresses the features which suggest or symbolise life: for instance, 'By the doorway of some tombs there is a carved stone house, or a stone imitation chest with sloping lids like the two sides of the roof of an oblong house' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.20). Each tomb is depicted as a 'home', and can be entered and experienced retrospectively, as both Dennis and Lawrence attempt to do.

Lawrence establishes a proximity with the Etruscan figures depicted in the Tarquinian tombs, through describing their feasting as if he were a contemporaneous observer:

The walls of this little tomb are a dance of real delight. The room seems inhabited still by Etruscans of the sixth century before Christ; a vivid, life-accepting people, who must have lived with real fulness. On come the dancers and the music-players, moving in a broad frieze towards the front wall of the tomb, the wall facing us as we enter from the dark stairs, and where the banquet is going on in all its glory. (Lawrence, 1992c, pp.47-8)

The desired involvement indicated by the use of the present tense - 'on come the dancers' - reveals the wish to participate also evident in 'Bavarian Gentians', in which the poet desires the status of invited guest:

Give me a flower on a tall stem, and three dark flames,  
for I will go to the wedding, and be wedding-guest  
at the marriage of the living dark.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.960)

It is through such involvement that the categories of life and death can become blurred, a blurring that Lawrence establishes as the natural result of the Etruscan habit of portraying vivid life-scenes in the houses of the dead:

The scene is natural as life, and yet it has a heavy archaic fullness of meaning. It is the death-banquet; and at the same time it is the dead man banqueting in the underworld; for the underworld of the Etruscans was a gay place. While the living feasted out of doors, at the tomb of the dead, the dead himself feasted in like manner, with a lady to offer him garlands and slaves to bring him wine, away in the underworld. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.46)

Just as the acropolis and necropolis rest on parallel hills, so parallel festivities take place in the upper world and the underworld.

Analogously, in the tombs at Cerveteri, the dead are imagined to be 'sleeping as if in life', which suggests the kind of peacefulness of repose that results from ease and the inevitability of reawakening precisely envisaged in the poem 'Pax':



Sleeping on the hearth of the living world  
yawning at home before the fire of life  
feeling the presence of the living God  
like a great reassurance  
a deep calm in the heart ...  
in the house of life.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.11; 1993a, p.700)

In this poem Lawrence asserts the desire for life that throughout *Last Poems* thwarts any attempt to accept 'oblivion' as the be-all and end-all. At the end of the draft poem 'Ship of Death' (which I will discuss in detail at the end of this chapter) a hint at 'procreation' supersedes the ostensible peace and fulfilment offered by a concept of sinking into the wonder-goal of oblivion. Although oblivion is described in 'All Soul's Day' as a 'sweet home' it cannot possess the vividness of the 'house of life' (or of an Etruscan tomb-home) with all its vitality. Significantly the poem 'Phoenix' - the last in the 'Last Poems' notebook - sees the sponging out or cancellation resulting from death as merely the antecedent of change. The death poems merge life and death, just as the Etruscans (in Lawrence's creation of them) blurred these two categories, so that they become parallel or easily consecutive experiences.

Both the 'hearth of the living world' and the idea of 'home' - used so frequently with regard to the Etruscan tombs - are crucial in *Last Poems*. In the blurring of life and death, hearth and home are seen as natural goals for the dead, as in 'In the Cities':

In Minos, in Mycenae  
in all the cities with lion gates  
the dead threaded the air, lingering  
lingering in the earth's shadow  
and leaning towards the old hearth.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.14; 1993a, p.704)

Here, the comfortable co-existence of the living and the dead is seen as a more general 'ancient' phenomenon than Lawrence's writings on the Etruscans would suggest. Such a co-existence is also evident in Lawrence's depiction of

the imagined 'return' of Hermes in the poem 'Maximus' when he comes in and sits down 'by the hearth'.

The dead who are allowed to lean on the old hearths are the antithesis of the modern mechanised dead who are homeless because modern man cannot welcome them back into life, nor prepare for them a death-ship with its complement of the objects from hearth and home:

**Oh, now they moan and throng in anger, and press back  
through breaches in the walls of this our by-no-means impregnable  
existence**

seeking their old haunts with cold, ghostly rage  
old haunts, old habitats, old hearths,  
old places of sweet life from which they are thrust out  
and can but haunt in disembodied rage.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.27; 1993a, pp.722-23)

The 'houseless dead' of modern times are described by Lawrence as catastrophically hostile, as in the poem 'Evil is Homeless', in which

Evil has no home,  
only evil has no home,  
not even the home of demoniacal hell.

(Lawrence, MS2, p.19; 1993a, p.711)

In this cluster of poems home is reified, while homelessness is seen as a greyness interestingly epitomised in a vision of 'grey Dante, colour-blind / to the scarlet and purple flowers at the doors of hell'. This greyness stands in contrast to the vivid light/dark and heaven/hell dichotomies; while the homelessness associated with this greyness contrasts with those (like the Etruscans, obviously) who can inhabit both infinities of dark and light at once: 'like Persephone, or Attis / there are souls that are at home in both homes'. This illuminates Persephone's role in 'Bavarian Gentians', for she embodies the ease of transition between the two homes of the upper and lower worlds.

'Bavarian Gentians', a poem which relates in terms of preoccupation and imagery, is in fact a version of the descent into an Etruscan tomb, or



'underworld home'. The term 'underworld' suggests that the tomb is envisaged as a kind of Hades, and Lawrence's experience of descent is described as follows:

The lamp begins to shine and smell, then to shine without smelling: the guide opens the iron gate, and we descend the steep steps down into the tomb. It seems a dark little hole underground: a dark little hole, after the sun of the upper world! (Lawrence, 1992c, p.44)

In the descent to Hades described in 'Bavarian Gentians', the poet leaves the 'heavy white draught of the day', also described as 'white-cast' and as 'Demeter's yellow-pale day', in order to descend into the underworld, aided by a 'torch-flower' rather than an acetylene lamp:

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!  
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of a flower  
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on  
blucness  
down the way Persephone goes, just now, in first-frosted September  
to the sightless realm where darkness is married to dark ...  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.9; 1993a, p.960)

As I have suggested, one fascination for Lawrence of this myth was that Persephone could inhabit two worlds in oscillation, thus embodying the cyclic pagan process of seasonal death and rebirth. This feeling of inhabiting the upper and lower worlds can be experienced fleetingly on visiting the Etruscan tombs at Tarquinia, until the dark realm of the underworld seems to possess the predominant and most vivid reality:

There are many tombs. When we have seen one, up we go, a little bewildered, into the afternoon sun, across a tract of rough, tormented hill, and down again to the underground, like rabbits in a warren. The hilltop is really a warren of tombs. And gradually the underworld of the Etruscans becomes more real than the above day of the afternoon. One begins to live with the painted dancers and feasters and mourners, and to look eagerly for them. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.49)

In the experience of visiting and exploring, the Etruscan life/death balance becomes a physical experience, even for modern man. Such balance underlies the poem 'Song of Death', in which it is asserted that 'without the song of death, the song of life / becomes pointless and silly' (Lawrence, MS2, p.28; 1993a, p.723); as well as 'When Satan Fell', in which 'heaven and hell are the scales of the balance of life / which swing against each other' (Lawrence, MS2, p.19; 1993a, p.710).

*'A Dream of Life': an intra-textual dramatisation of the Etruscan myth.*

It is in the depiction of the people in the fragment 'A Dream of Life' (written in 1928) that the images and ideas arising from the amalgamation of the anthropological and the Etruscan reach an apotheosis. In this fragment Lawrence seems to be dramatising his own working out of the Etruscan myth, projecting its people into a future Eastwood along with a narrator who has to explore ways of relating to them. The narrator - reincarnated in 2927, the year of the acorn - is immediately struck by the 'floweriness' of the strangers:

I had a sudden idea: How beautiful they are, like plants in flower! But still, it was something I felt, rather than saw.

(Lawrence, 1936, p.828)

The people combine the 'ease' of the Etruscans with the wholeness and completeness not of a Grecian artefact but of a fruit:

That was the quality of all the people: an inner stillness and ease, like plants that come to flower and fruit. The individual was like a whole fruit, body and mind and spirit, without split.

(Lawrence, 1936, pp.830-31)

The mind/spirit union suggests the kind of 'wholeness' that is envisaged at the end of 'The Ship of Death' in which 'the body emerges strange and lovely / and



the soul steps into her house again filling the heart with peace' (Lawrence, MS2, p.25; 1993a, p.720).

The women of 'A Dream of Life' are described as being comely like 'rose-berries on a bush', while by contrast the reclining blond-haired man to whom the narrator is taken has 'the beauty of a flower rather than of a berry' (Lawrence, 1936, pp.830-31). A man of the green guard has the 'same quiet, fruit-like glow of the men who had found me, a quality of beauty that came from inside, in some queer physical way' (Lawrence, 1936, p.833). When the people dance, the men are 'stamping softly, like bulls'; while the women are 'softly swaying, and softly clapping their hands, with a strange noise, like leaves' (Lawrence, 1936, p.823).

The extent of their floweriness is frightening to the uninitiated observer:

I was afraid: afraid for myself. These people, it seemed to me, were not people, not human beings in my sense of the word. They had the stillness and the completeness of plants. And see how they could melt into one amazing instinctive thing, a human flock of motion.

(Lawrence, 1936, p.833)

The juxtaposition of 'completeness' and 'melt' is striking: paradoxically these people seem to have a completeness that is in no way fixed or rigid, but enables them to remain fluid.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The completeness of plants remains distinct from Lawrence's earlier sense of the completeness of the Italian people whose Etruscan nature contrasts with modern, 'deflowered' faces:

There was a completeness about him, about the pallid otherworld he inhabited, which excluded sadness. It was too complete, too final, too defined. There was no yearning, no vague merging off into mistiness...He was as clear and fine as semi-transparent rock, as a substance in moonlight. He seemed like a crystal that has achieved its final shape and has nothing more to achieve. (Lawrence, 1985a, pp.107-8)

In the above description, the attainment of a crystal-like definition allows a man to be alone and substantial, beyond sadness. Yet by 1928-30, such crystal-like self-sufficiency would have harboured the inevitable association of the 'gem'-like poetry ascribed to Keats and Shelley, which in 'Poetry of the Present' is the antithesis of the transience and 'livingness' of free verse. Hence the significance of a 'completeness' that can be seen as



The narrator of 'A Dream of Life' suffers through feeling less anthropologically 'whole' than the native inhabitants, yet the envy is juxtaposed with an onrush of transferred energy:

It made me feel a curious, sad sort of envy, because I was not so whole, and at the same time, I was wildly elated, my rushing sort of energy seemed to come upon me again. I felt as if I were just going to plunge into the depths of life, for the first time: belated, and yet a pioneer of pioneers. (Lawrence, 1936, pp.830-31)

He is able to experience vicariously the kind of strength and elation that characterises the life of the plant- or flower-like Newthorpe residents, showing that this contact is one reliant on 'touch' and warmth. It is as if the narrator has

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compatible with fluidity and change. One question that arises is how a poetic form could equate to or possess this kind of 'completeness'. The fascination of Etruscan art is, in fact, attributable rather to *incompleteness*: to the incompleteness of the paintings that have been half-obliterated by the passage of time; and to the mystery, facilitating imaginative interpretation, that arises from the scholars' lack of empirical data. 'A Dream of Life' remains appropriately incomplete, existing without even a title of its own, and ending as it does with a depiction of human life as ephemeral, fragile and unhampered, like that of a 'Butterfly':

'Why are you so afraid to be a butterfly that wakes up out of the dark for a little while, beautiful? Be beautiful, then, like a white butterfly. Take off your clothes and let the firelight fall on you. What is given, accept then—'

'How long shall I live now, do you think?' I asked him.

'Why will you always measure? Life is not a clock.'

It is true. I am like a butterfly, and I shall only live a little while.

That is why I don't want to eat. (Lawrence, 1936, p.836)

This last exchange relates obviously to the poem 'Butterfly', in which a 'big white butterfly' departs from the walled garden of life into the unknown: implicitly it has gleamed and disappeared. Yet this phrase suggests an ease of departure that is certainly not evident in the poem, in which the question 'will you go then' is yearning and wistful. The poem is split between acceptance and regret, yet finds some sort of resolution at the end - a recognition that acceptance is all: 'it is enough / I saw you vanish into air!' By contrast, 'A Dream of Life' is a fragment, and while it finishes with a celebration of transience, the narrator's attitude towards this is neither articulated nor made explicit. Perhaps the simplicity with which he feels 'this is true' expresses a kind of Etruscan ease - but this seems belied by the preceding feelings of puzzlement, doubt and sorrow that prevent the rebirth from being in any true sense utopian. Perhaps, then, this text can be described as an odd, spontaneous form, ending with the butterfly image which is both 'new' and 'strange' in the context of the tale, but also derives from previous suggestions of the cyclic, seasonal nature of pagan death and regeneration.



been precipitated into a world in which the 'life-loving' Etruscans are able to provide what is described as a 'soft flow of touch':

They lifted me, and I leaned on one, standing, while the other washed me. The other I leaned on was warm, and his life softly warmed me. The other one rubbed me gently. I was alive. I saw my white feet like two curious flowers, and I lifted them one after another, remembering walking. (Lawrence, 1936, p.827)<sup>9</sup>

The description of the feet as 'curious flowers' relates to 'Shadows' in which the poet, who has been 'walking still / with God' so that they are 'close together' conceives renewal as 'odd wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers'. The contact is not one that relies on words, although it suggests the 'music of lost languages' considered earlier:

I turned to look at the man I was resting on, and met the blue, quiet shimmer of his eyes. He said something to me, in the quiet, full voice, and I nearly understood, because it was like the dialect. He said it again, softly and calmly, speaking to the inside of me, so that I understood as a dog understands, from the voice, not from the words.  
(Lawrence, 1936, pp.827-28)

The sense of simultaneous intimacy and command, rather than the meaning of the words, is what matters, and there is no forced effort of communication which would contradict the ease of exchange.

As in *The Escaped Cock*, the narrator of 'A Dream of Life' is resurrected into touch, in which rather than the hands of the woman of Isis, who rubs oil into the Christ-figure's wounds, the warmth of the Etruscan-Newthorpe inhabitants has the power to heal:

And almost immediately the soft, warm rhythm of his life pervaded me again, and the memory in me which was my old self went to sleep. I

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<sup>9</sup> This passage is reminiscent of the passage in *The White Peacock*, in which George rubs Cyril's wet body, and the two experience a mutual touch that is 'superb' (see Lawrence, 1983a, p.222): Lawrence never leaves such experiences completely behind but is always revisiting and recreating, going back himself to the old home, and never as a stranger.

was like a wound, and the touch of these men healed me at once.  
(Lawrence, 1936, p.829)

The title of Whitman's poem 'The Wound-Dresser'; the term 'pansy' (incorporating the French term 'panser': to soothe or dress a wound) and the more obvious 'pensée' association (relating to the *Pensées* of Pascal, the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld and the *Caractères* of La Bruyère) all serve as contexts for the necessary and almost instantaneous healing of a wound described here. In Etruscan terms, the healing is attributable to the 'soft flow of touch' that became so crucial in the 1928 version of the novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

The physical descriptions of the Newthorpe residents, who embody the principle of 'touch' sought in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, highlight the diversity of races and mythologies incorporated in Lawrence's vision of a reborn Eastwood, and the correlation between these figures and those described in *Last Poems*. One man, for instance, has 'a ruddy sort of face with a nose and a trimmed beard' (Lawrence, 1936, p.826); others have 'formal, peaceful faces and trimmed beards, like old Egyptians' (Lawrence, 1936, p.827). Three horsemen who canter towards the narrator at sunset are described as 'men in soft, yellow sleeveless tunics, with the same still, formal Egyptian faces and trimmed beards as my companions' (Lawrence, 1936, p.829). The majority of the inhabitants are naked, slender and sun-bronzed, and in such descriptions as the following strikingly resemble the Etruscans depicted on the tomb-walls at Tarquinia:

their slender, rosy-tanned bodies were quite naked, save for a little girdle of white and green and purple cord fringe that hung round their hips and swung as they walked. Only they had soft shoes on their feet.  
(Lawrence, 1936, p.830)



They differ only in having 'soft shoes' rather than the narrow, 'fanciful' shoes worn by the long-nosed Etruscans of 'Cypresses', perhaps indicative of the unhampered ease with which they walk and dance.

The heroes of *Last Poems* are analogously bearded, sun-bronzed (even red), and careless in the Etruscan sense of the word:

Oh, and their faces scarlet, like the dolphin's blood!  
Lo! the loveliest is red all over, rippling vermillion  
as he ripples upwards!  
laughing in his black beard!

They are dancing! they return, as they went, dancing!  
For the thing that is done without the glowing as of god, vermillion,  
were best not done at all.  
How glistening red they are!

(Lawrence, MS2, p.3; 1993a, p.689)

In *Sketches*, Lawrence describes how the men are 'always painted a darkish red, which is the colour of many Italians when they go naked in the sun, as the Etruscans went' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.44). Also, in the poem from which the above quotation derives - 'For the Heroes are Dipped in Scarlet' - the heroes have 'long hair, like Samson'; while the man who has the beauty of a flower rather than a fruit in 'A Dream of Life' has a 'trimmed beard and hair worn long' (Lawrence, 1936, pp.830-31). In describing the 'heroes' of this (and other) poems, Lawrence offers a new definition of the heroic: the quality of pre-Platonic men who 'slimly went like fishes and didn't care'.

The reference to dancing in the above poem - and in particular in relation to the 'glowing as of god' - is also interpretable in terms of the depiction of dances and banquets on the walls of the Tarquinian tombs. Lawrence gives lengthy descriptions in *Sketches* of Etruscan dances, and considers that the vitality of the Etruscan people is epitomised and revealed in this activity:

This sense of vigorous, strong-bodied liveliness is characteristic of the Etruscans, and is somehow beyond art. You cannot think of art, but only of life itself, as if this were the very life of the Etruscans, dancing in their coloured wraps with massive yet exuberant naked limbs, ruddy from the air and the sea-light, dancing and fluting along through the little olive trees, out in the fresh day.

(Lawrence, 1992c, p.48)

In the dance scene in 'A Dream of Life', Etruscan art becomes life as observed by the newcomer:

It was all kept very soft, soft-breathing. Yet the dance swept into swifter and swifter rhythm, with the most extraordinary incalculable unison...The thing happened by instinct, like the wheeling and flashing of a shoal of fish or of a flock of birds dipping and spreading in the sky. Suddenly, in one amazing wing-movement, the arms of all the men would flash up into the air, naked and glowing, and with the soft, rushing sound of pigeons alighting the men ebbed in a spiral, grey and sparkled with scarlet, bright arms slowly leaning upon the women, who rustled all crocus-blue, rustled like an aspen, then in one movement scattered like sparks, in every direction...

(Lawrence, 1936, p.823)

The 'flock of birds dipping and spreading' is strikingly similar to the depiction of the birds for instance on the walls of the 'tomb of hunting and fishing' at Tarquinia; while the reference to shoals of fish relates to another unfinished tale 'The Flying-Fish', in which Gethin Day watches a shoal of porpoises with fascination (Lawrence, 1983b, pp.220-21). The fishes achieve what may also be referred to as an 'extraordinary, incalculable unison' in which they change places constantly, but remain part of the shoal: they are simultaneously separate and in unison, just as the dancers each constitute a 'drop in that wave of life'.

In terms of their physical location, as well as their physicality, the Newthorpe inhabitants resemble the Etruscans: Lawrence's native Eastwood is now characterised by houses possessing the characteristics of specific Etruscan tombs. The clearest indication of this is evident on consideration of Lawrence's description of a particular tomb at Cerveteri:



The central chamber is large; perhaps there is a great square column of rock left in the centre, apparently supporting the solid roof as a roof-tree supports the roof of a house. And all round the chamber goes the broad bed of rock, sometimes a double tier, on which the dead were laid, in their coffins, or lying open upon carved litters of stone or wood, a man glittering in golden armour, or a woman in white and crimson robes, with great necklaces round their necks, and rings on their fingers. Here lay the family, the great chiefs and their wives, the Lucomones,<sup>10</sup> and their sons and daughters, many in one tomb.

(Lawrence, 1992c, p.17)

This description of a circular tomb - probably the Inghirami tomb at Cerveteri - in which the dead were laid full-length around the edge on a 'broad bed of rock', may be juxtaposed with the 'circular room' described in 'A Dream of Life', peopled with the live inhabitants of Newthorpe:

Then he took me down to a big circular room with a raised hearth in the centre, and a blazing wood fire whose flame and smoke rose to a beautiful funnel-shaped canopy chimney of stone. The hearth spread out beyond the canopy, and here some men reclined on the folded felts, with little white cloths before them, eating an evening meal of stiff porridge and milk, with liquid butter, fresh lettuce, and apples. They had taken off their clothes, and lay with the firelight flickering on their healthy, fruit-like bodies, the skin glistening faintly with oil. Around the circular wall ran a broad dais where other men reclined, either eating or resting. And from time to time a man came in with his food, or departed with his dishes. (Lawrence, 1936, p.833)

The circularity of the room/tomb with the 'great square column of rock' or 'funnel-shaped canopy chimney of stone' at the centre and the 'broad bed of rock' or 'broad dais' on which bodies recline suggests an obvious physical parallel of location. This is emphasised by a description of a 'dead man' as portrayed in a Tarquinian design who 'reclines upon his banqueting couch with his flat wine-dish in his hand, resting on his elbow, and beside him, also half risen, reclines a handsome and jewelled lady in fine robes, apparently resting

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<sup>10</sup> See note to 17:16: 'The highest political, judicial and religious authority in each city was a priest-king, called *Lauchme* ("Chief" or "Lord") in Etruscan, or *lucomo* in Latin; he was chosen from among the oldest and most distinguished families' (Filippis, 1992, p.298).

her left hand upon the naked breast of the man'. Although the fine robes of the Newthorpe inhabitants have been discarded so they are utterly naked, and they get their own (simple) food rather than having it brought by slaves, the reclining posture suggests exactly the 'ease' of the Etruscan live and dead. On Etruscan sarcophagi, a stone effigy of the dead reclines in exactly this way, propped on one elbow: so that before the sarcophagi were removed to museums, a visitor entering a tomb would have perceived numerous reclining figures - either half-naked or robed - on a bed of rock. In 'A Dream of Life', Lawrence thus seems to be filling an 'empty' Etruscan tomb with live, fruit-like re-born Etruscans - perhaps exaggerating their 'naturalness' by divesting them of their finery - and establishing a proximity that enables the narrator to come into touch with the insouciant men and women.

*Furnishing a poem: 'The Ship of Death'.*

'The Ship of Death' is the most obviously 'Etruscan' poem in *Last Poems*, as it takes an explicitly Etruscan artifact as its primary symbol, while by implication the short poems following in the *Last Poems* notebook which initially belonged to the 'Ship of Death' draft may also be said to be of predominantly Etruscan origin.<sup>11</sup> The ship image derives from Lawrence's description of one tomb, in which he imagined a 'little bronze ship of death' among the other sacred treasures of the dead:

Facing the door goes the stone bed on which were laid, presumably, the Lucomo and the sacred treasures of the dead, the little bronze ship of death that should bear him over to the other world, the vases of jewels for his arraying, the vases of small dishes, the little bronze statuettes and tools, the weapons, the armour: all the amazing impedimenta of the important dead. Or sometimes in this inner room lay the woman, the great lady, in all her jewels and combs and silver

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<sup>11</sup> The poems 'The Houseless Dead' and 'Beware the Unhappy dead' are offshoots of the long draft version entitled 'Ship of Death'. This long draft, when revised and copied into the 'Last Poems' notebook became the sectionalised poem entitled 'The Ship of Death', followed a series of short poems on the same theme.



boxes of cosmetics, in urns and vases ranged alongside. Splendid was the array they went with, into death. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.17)

In another passage Lawrence describes the 'little bronze figures, statuettes, animals, bronze ships, of which the Etruscans put thousands in the tombs, [which] became all the rage with the Roman collectors' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.21).

These passages are interesting when it is recognised that the death ship seems to have been rather an imaginative Lawrentian construct, than an Etruscan artefact. Lawrence could not have seen 'thousands' of death ships in the museums, for there were scarcely any in existence. In a recent tour of the Etruscan sites I was only able to identify one bronze ship taken from the tombs, and this one was an imitation of a Sardinian trading vessel, found in a tomb that Lawrence did not see, although housed in the Etruscan section of the Museo Archeologico in Florence, which he did visit. Also, there is no mention of a bronze ship in the standard literature discussing the Etruscan artefacts. It seems that Lawrence was engaging in his predictably eclectic myth-making and combining the Etruscan with the Egyptian tradition of placing a ship in the tomb, to ferry the soul across the sea of death.

The Egyptian ships were not made of bronze, but those in the British museum are large enough to fill with the impedimenta equipping the voyaging soul for its journey. Certainly these articles, as well as the bronze utensils and other objects placed in the Etruscan tombs, must have provoked the 'accoutrements' described in 'The Ship of Death':

A little ship, with oars and food  
and little dishes, and all accoutrements  
fitting and ready for the departing soul. ...

Now launch the small ship ...  
with its store of food and little cooking pans  
and change of clothes...

(Lawrence, MS2, p.24; 1993a, p.718-19)

In order to furnish this little ship, Lawrence is figuratively furnishing or enriching his own mythological frame of reference, and by so-doing creates an image that combines practicality and precision with affection, and also suggests an Etruscan response to the 'dear dead'. The reiterated exhortation 'Pity the poor dead' in the early draft is an attempt to provoke a genuinely affectionate (rather than altruistic but detached) reciprocity that would lead to the kind of impulse that compelled the Etruscans to equip the tombs so lavishly, with such designs and such accoutrements as would seem more obviously serviceable to the living.

In 'The Ship of Death' the ship is referred to as an 'ark of faith'; while in the draft version the core of oblivion is described as 'like the foldings and involvings of a womb', the 'womb-like convoluted shadow' and the 'womb of silence in the living night'. The womb-ark association is also explicable in terms of an Etruscan image:

The stone house, as the boy calls it, suggests the Noah's Ark without the boat part: the Noah's Ark box we had as children, full of animals. And that is what it is, the Ark, the *arx*, the womb. The womb of all the world, that brought forth all the creatures. The womb, the *arx*, where life retreats in the last refuge. The womb, the ark of the covenant, in which lies the mystery of eternal life, the mana and the mysteries. There it is, standing displaced outside the doorway of Etruscan tombs at Cerveteri. (Lawrence, 1992c, p.20)

Interestingly, the single bronze Etruscan ship in the Florence museum has bronze animals as decoration around the rim. Certainly the ark of the covenant and the ark of faith of the poem are linked; while the womb in which 'lies the mystery of eternal life' may also suggest the sea into which the soul's 'life retreats in the last refuge' (being sponged out, made nothing) before emerging into a vision of rebirth.

The rebirth envisaged combines dawn and twilight, creating a colour-scheme analogous to the images portrayed by Lawrence in *Twilight in Italy*. He describes, for instance how 'the wonderful, faint, ethereal flush of the long



range of snow in the heavens, at evening, began to kindle. Another world was coming to pass, the cold, rare night. It was dawning in exquisite, icy rose upon the long mountain-summit opposite' (Lawrence, 1985a, p.29). In 'The Ship of Death' the description is as follows:

And yet out of eternity a thread  
separates itself on the blackness,  
a horizontal thread  
that fumes a little with pallor upon the dark.

Is it illusion? or does the pallor fume  
A little higher?  
Ah wait, wait, for there's the dawn,  
the cruel dawn of coming back to life  
out of oblivion.

Wait, wait, the little ship  
drifting, beneath the deathly ashy grey  
of a flood-dawn.

Wait, wait, even so, a flush of yellow  
and strangely, O chilled wan soul, a flush of rose.

A flush of rose, and the whole thing starts again.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.25; 1993a, p.720)

This moment of reawakening might be said to create an ultimate balance, overriding distinction and antithesis, resulting in a fusion:

Meanwhile, on the length of mountain-ridge, the snow grew rosy-incandescent, like heaven breaking into blossom. After all, eternal not-being and eternal being are the same. In the rosy snow that shone in heaven over a darkened earth was the ecstasy of consummation. Night and day are one, light and dark are one, both the same in the origin and in the issue, both the same in the moment of ecstasy, light fused in darkness and darkness fused in light, as in the rosy snow above the twilight. (Lawrence, 1985a, p.30)

Balance is suggested by the phrase 'Swings the heart renewed with peace' - perhaps the heart is swinging from the nothingness of oblivion to the warmth of

life 'as a magnetised needle swings towards soft iron' (Lawrence, 1985a, p.109).

Yet the waking is simultaneously a 'cruel' dawn, inevitably painful and bewildering. In 'A Dream of Life' the narrator hears: 'It is perhaps cruel to awaken ...even at a good moment' (Lawrence, 1936, p.835); while the waking narrator of 'The Escaped Cock' experiences overriding pain, nausea and unspeakable disillusion at coming back to life. The hints at resurrection in the stories and poems regularly imply a desired continuance of life that oscillates with a desire for the utter peace of oblivion in which the reawakening soul cries to sleep (or be nothing) once again.

'The Ship of Death' reveals the problematic nature of the attempt to make a 'bruise or break of exit' from this life - just as the poem 'Butterfly' stresses the difficulty of leaving the warm, walled garden of our earthly existence, submitting to the wind that drives us into the cold unknown. The poem 'Difficult Death' asserts this problem unequivocally, saying 'It is not easy to die, O it is not easy / to die the death': and also stresses the need to 'build your ship of death' in order to drift towards dark oblivion. 'All Souls' Day' analogously begins with the exhortation 'Be careful, then, and be gentle about death. For it is hard to die, it is difficult to go through / the door, even when it opens'. However, 'Difficult Death' ends with an assertion of rebirth: 'Maybe life is still our portion / after the bitter passage of oblivion'. The 'passage' between life and death is seen as possible when envisaged in Etruscan terms, aided literally and metaphorically by the impedimenta of the little tombs which are emblematic of the preservation of a constructive interrelation between life and death. This emphasises the significance of doors, gates, exits and entrances both in relation to the tombs and in the poetry, where they become prevalent in the consideration of the passage between life and death.

Lawrence's association of the life/death transition with the Etruscans is suggested by his depiction of the 'leopards or panthers of the underworld Bacchus, guarding the exits and the entrances of the passion of life' (Lawrence,



1992c, p.49), when describing The Tomb of the Leopards. In his description of the tombs he also describes the 'rock doorway, rather narrow, and narrowing upwards, like Egypt'; and the 'inner doorway' leading to the 'last chamber, small and dark and cumulative' (Lawrence, 1992c, p.17). The poem 'Doors' considers such dark doors of the underworld:

Life has its palace of blue day aloft  
and its halls of the great dark below,  
and there are the bright doors where souls go gaily in:  
and there are the dark doors where souls pass silently  
holding their breath, naked and darkly alone  
entering into the other communion.

There is a double sacredness of doors.  
Some you may sing through, and all men hear,  
but others, the dark doors, oh hush! hush!  
let nobody be about! slip in! go all unseen.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.19; 1993a, p.711)

The dark doors of the silent Etruscans are suggested by the references to quietness, darkness and nakedness; they also confirm the contrast between the bright upper world and the 'Bavarian Gentians' Hades-like world below. A further parallel is suggested in the first stanza of the poem, by the reference to the 'double Phallus of the devil himself / with his key to the two dark doors'. In *Sketches* Lawrence refers specifically to the double-coned stone phalluses found at the entrances to certain tombs; while the entrances of course have their own dark doors through which one gains entry to the inner chambers.

As well as the actual doorways providing access to the tombs, however, the tombs often possess a false door, painted on one side of the tomb. Perhaps this false door symbolised the passage of the dead into the Etruscan equivalent of Hades - the dark doors leading to another communion - thus creating an ease of return in which the soul, if compelled to leave the tomb and seek an exit, could enter again and reinhabit the tomb-house.

In this context, the return of the slender soul to its 'house' again at the end of 'The Ship of Death' may be subject to a new interpretation. Critics have

often been disturbed by the ostensible emphasis on spirituality rather than corporeality in this poem - an interpretation that relies on seeing the reinhabiting of the 'house again' as the metaphorically charged movement of a disembodied soul back into the body ('house'), thus achieving a 'peace' of heart resulting from the wholeness in which the two halves of the Cartesian dichotomy are fused. This interpretation is justified, particularly as the body is seen as a bruised apple (perhaps suggesting a previous fruit-like wholeness): the inhabitants of Newthorpe are at one point referred to as 'ripe apples' from which the 'soul' must find an exit. However, the Etruscan tomb-house with its impedimenta suggests that the 'house' described in the poem is a physical location: a place with rooms, cooking pans and food rather than a metaphor for the empty shell of a soulless body. The slender soul in 'The Ship of Death' may not merely indicate a Cartesian split: it is not just a soul in the spiritual sense but a soul in the colloquial sense of 'ah, the poor soul!' (i.e. person). The soul at the end of the poem undergoes a return similar to that experienced by the heroes of the mythological poems: it steps back physically into an old home (perhaps leaning towards an old familiar hearth) which may be envisaged as an Etruscan-tomb-home or as the kind of house described in 'Pax' or 'Maximus'.

The poem 'Silence', like 'Doors', considers the implications of a silent passing, only this time gates rather than doors provide access:

For now we are passing through the gate, stilly,  
 in the sacred silence of gates  
 in the silence of passing through doors,  
 in the great hush of going from this into that,  
 in the suspension of wholeness, in the moment of division within the whole!

Lift up your heads, O ye Gates!  
 (Lawrence, MS2, p.10; 1993a, p.699)

In 'Invocation to the Moon' the re-entry into a house is also seen as a passage through a gate rather than a door:



Now, lady of the Moon, now open the gate of your silvery house  
and let me come past the silver bells of your flowers, and the cockle-shells  
into your house, garmentless lady of the last great gift ...

(Lawrence, MS2, p.7; 1993a, p.696)

The passing through gates into silence is also imagined in 'A Dream of Life', in which the narrator desires as he lies down in his small cave to achieve a new birth of some kind through passing through a gate into another world:

And in this still, warm, secret place of the earth I felt my old childish  
longing to pass through a gate, into a deeper, sunnier, more silent  
world. (Lawrence, 1936, p.824)

The above may be taken as a paradigm for Lawrence's desire to find access to another culture, another more silent, sunnier world, through the imagination. For modern man, perhaps, this imaginative leap is awkward: it is hard to find an appropriate cave in which to lie down, for 'man has ravished all the peaceful, oblivious places, where the angels used to alight'. Yet through imaginative engagement with a culture such as the Etruscans such a passage can be achieved.

In his Etruscan trip Lawrence has literally passed through the iron gate at the mouth of every tomb and the 'lion-gates' of each ancient city; while figuratively, through the imagination, he descended into a deeper, sunnier world of the 'silent Etruscans'. In the mythological poems he has emphasised the possibility of re-entry through doors into an ancient world: a preoccupation which has been prevalent in Lawrence's writing since his early years. In the intra-text *Sketches* as well as the crucially related late mythological poems Lawrence achieves his imaginative passage by inviting the Etruscans to 'return' in order to inhabit his new vision.

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## Chapter 7 *Last Poems and Apocalypse*

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It is impossible to consider, analyse and explore Lawrence's *Last Poems* effectively without reference to his last book, *Apocalypse*; as, I hope, my frequent allusions to this text throughout the preceding chapters have indicated. It was Richard Aldington in 1932 who imposed the title *Last Poems* on the notebook collections of verse that Lawrence was compiling prior to his death. Yet Lawrence himself chose the title *Apocalypse* for his subsequent book, suggesting a direct correlation with its Biblical counterpart, the last book in the Old Testament. It has been suggested that:

Ranging over his entire system of thought on God and man, on psychology, science, politics and art, *Apocalypse* is Lawrence's last testament, his final attempt to convey his vision of man and of the cosmos to posterity. (Kalnins, 1995, p.11)

*Apocalypse* was the only large-scale work Lawrence wrote after *Last Poems*, and Kalnins attempts to convey its significance as that of a book which is a summation of crucial areas in Lawrence's thinking. Certainly the two 'last' books (one, of course, only posthumously a book) are very closely related, which is unsurprising when considering that much of the preparation for the writing of *Apocalypse* would have been concurrent with the composition of the late poems.

It is probable that Lawrence began writing *Apocalypse* in mid-November 1929; and I suggest that he may well have broken off his poetry writing at that time, when applying himself to the longer prose-work. If so, the last book directly succeeded the poems, and might usefully be seen in part as a 'writing-up' of certain crucial ideas formulated in the course of his poetry-writing. Arguably then, *Apocalypse* stands in relation to *Last Poems* as *Sons*



*and Lovers* does to *Love Poems*, *Look! We Have Come Through* does to *The Rainbow*, and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* does to *Women in Love*. Both *Apocalypse* and *Fantasia* are examples of prose exegesis which engage with and interpret ideas formulated and explored imaginatively through other kinds of writing.

It is particularly appropriate, given Lawrence's attitude towards thought and insight articulated in *Apocalypse*, to consider the prose-work as an expression of ideas that had been reached through the modulation of images and symbols in the preceding poetry. Lawrence formulates a theory that is particularly appropriate to his own late work, involving an adherence to 'sense-awareness' rather than more modern methods of analysis. In the 'sense-awareness' or 'sense-knowledge' of the ancients (as Lawrence sees it), reason could be arrived at 'direct', via instinct and intuition rather than reason. The access to this kind of awareness would not be through words but through images, and there would be no necessity for logic, for the connection would be 'emotional':

Images or symbols succeeded one another in a procession of instinctive and arbitrary physical connection—some of the Psalms give us examples—and they 'get nowhere' because there was nowhere to get to, the desire was to achieve a consummation of a certain state of consciousness, to fulfil a certain state of feeling-awareness.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.91)

In her introduction to the Penguin edition of *Apocalypse* Kalnins argues that such assertions regarding the nature of image and symbol 'also illuminate [Lawrence's] own idiosyncratic method of interpreting Revelation',

a method which eschews intellectual and scholarly analysis and instead relies on insights yielded by an imaginative response to the accumulation of images. His way of reading Revelation exemplifies the tendency of the creative mind, as he believed, to move naturally in cycles in its effort to attain full interpretation and understanding.

(Kalnins, 1995, p.20)

Kalnins' account seems however reductive and simplistic, in creating an antithesis in which scholarship and insight are at opposite poles; while in fact Lawrence's interpretation of Revelation engages with and relies on both. Lawrence is concerned not with closing off methodological possibilities and modes of exploration, but with creating a style of writing that emulates the workings of a liberated mind. He aims to be a writer who 'starts with an image, sets the image in motion, allows it to achieve a certain course or circuit of its own, and then takes up another image' (Lawrence, 1980, p.96), enabling 'the mind to move in cycles, or to flit here and there over a cluster of images' (Lawrence, 1980, p.97). This conception of cyclic and modulatory images seems almost more appropriate for describing the methodology employed in the *Last Poems* than it does for the subsequent prose text, as poetry can operate according to the 'rotary-image thought' that Lawrence associated with the workings of the pagan consciousness. A poem can explore an image or impression through modulation and repetition. It has the further advantage in that a decision or result is not always necessary or appropriate: it is sufficient that a particular kind of sense-awareness or sense-knowledge has been attained. The poem may not result in or necessitate a decision or action, yet it will provoke insight.

Considering *Apocalypse* as in some ways a writing-up of the insights gained through image-making and symbolism in *Last Poems* suggests an intertextual process that is itself linear: a one-directional progression in which the later text develops as a response to the former. Such a linear progression would be interesting in itself, as it concerns the development through and beyond *Last Poems*, while hitherto I have explored only the texts that lead up to this poetry collection. This sense of linearity, however, would over-simplify the kind of intertextuality that has permeated both *Apocalypse* and *Last Poems*. Lawrence's interest in Apocalyptic literature dates certainly back to 1924, when Lawrence encountered Frederick Carter and reviewed Dr. John Oman's



*Book of Revelation*.<sup>1</sup> Yet the influence can be traced back even further: to Lawrence's reading of James Pryse's *The Apocalypse Unsealed* in or before 1917.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, however, in order to chart Lawrence's active literary engagement both with apocalyptic texts and with the problem of man's ultimate destiny, it is necessary to go way back even before these seminal textual experiences: once again to a consideration of Lawrence's childhood.

### *A youthful indoctrination.*

During Lawrence's childhood in Eastwood he was dosed, or overdosed, on the apocalyptic language of the King James Bible. He was exposed to the language and images of Revelation in the same way that he was exposed in early life to the 'banal' Non-conformist hymns that he felt influenced him so profoundly; and to the poems that were woven deep into his consciousness:

I was brought up on the Bible, and seem to have it in my bones. From early childhood I have been familiar with Apocalyptic language and Apocalyptic image: not because I spent my time reading Revelation, but because I was sent to Sunday School and to Chapel, to Band of Hope and to Christian Endeavour, and was always having the Bible read at me or to me. I did not even listen attentively. But language has a power of echoing and re-echoing in my unconscious mind. I can wake up in the night and 'hear' things being said—or hear a piece of music—to which I had paid no attention during the day. The very sound itself registers. And so the sound of Revelation had registered in me very early, and I was as used to: 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying: I am the Alpha and the Omega'—as I was to a nursery rhyme like Little Bo-Peep! I didn't know the meaning, but then children so often prefer sound to sense. (Lawrence, 1980, pp.54-5)

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence initial interest in Oman's book was probably a result of his early correspondence with Carter involving apocalyptic themes (see Lawrence 1987b p.583). Lawrence offered to review Oman's book and sent the finished piece to John Middleton Murry.

<sup>2</sup> See letter to David Eder (Lawrence, 1984, p.150).

The extent to which Lawrence was affected by Pryse's book is evident in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, in which Lawrence adopts many of Pryse's key terms and concepts regarding the 'biological psyche', and discusses and reinterprets these in the light of his own psychoanalytic thinking.

This passage suggests a process of interiorisation that is sub-conscious, unwilled and irrational, such as that described in 'Hymns in a Man's Life' (see p.48). The profundity and duration of such early experiences can be identified in retrospect as fundamental, so that it becomes possible to refer to 'the phrases that have haunted us all our life' (Lawrence, 1980, p.47).

A consideration of childhood influence of this sort is the focus of the very opening of Lawrence's *Apocalypse*, in which the interiorisation process is identified as an extremely harmful indoctrination resulting in a resentment, repudiation and fixity of response. Lawrence describes the way in which he 'had the Bible poured every day into my helpless consciousness, till there came almost a saturation point' from 'earliest years right into manhood', so that it 'soaked in' and became an 'influence which affected all the processes of emotion and thought'. After such saturation, any fleeting contact would provoke an awareness of deep-rooted familiarity: 'although I have "forgotten" my Bible, I need only begin to read a chapter to realise that I "know" it with an almost nauseating fixity. And I must confess, my first reaction is one of dislike, repulsion, and even resentment. My very instincts *resent* the Bible' (Lawrence, 1980, p.59). Lawrence elaborates on the fixity of response which was in his case occasioned by his early, indiscriminate but brutally persistent indoctrination:

Not only was the Bible verbally trodden into the consciousness, like innumerable foot-prints treading a surface hard, but the foot-prints were always mechanically alike, the interpretation was fixed, so that all real interest was lost. (Lawrence, 1980, p.59)

The 'nauseating fixity' is attributable largely to the fact that the Bible was 'day in, day out, year in, year out expounded, dogmatically, and always morally expounded', and the 'interpretation was always the same'. This fixity is analogous to that described in the essays 'Chaos in Poetry' and also 'Poetry of the Present'. In 'Poetry of the Present', Lawrence suggests how the poetry of



the past and future is fixed or crystallised, rather than existing in a living, transient mutation or flux. Poetry of the present is differentiated through 'intermingling', 'quivering' and being 'momentaneous'. Like poetry of the past, the Biblical language in his own consciousness, which was once vital and startling, has been forced into an interpretative straitjacket, and its visionary potential has become suppressed or submerged.

It was the visionary potential latent in Revelation - the deeper, uncovered strata of meaning and resonance - that fascinated Lawrence, rather than its ostensible 'meaning'. He may have felt that Moffatt's translation, with its greater simplicity than the KJB version, afforded him an escape-route from the fixity resulting from his youthful indoctrination. He felt that (like the Etruscan mythological interpretations) Revelation was a text possessed of interpretative possibilities; a text with meanings lurking behind meanings, and with the infinite appeal of the undiscovered and undiscoverable:

When all is explained and expounded and commented upon, still there remains a curious fitful, half-spurious and half-splendid wonder in the work...Sometimes the figures have a life of their own, inexplicable, which cannot be explained away or exhausted...Gradually we realize the book has no one meaning. It has meanings. Not meaning *within* meaning: but rather, meaning against meaning.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.48)

Here Lawrence provides a context for his own offer of a particular interpretation of Revelation, implying that this 'meaning' is in no way definitive. An approach recognising that a text contains 'meaning against meaning' is one which refuses to be afraid of contradiction or paradox. Rather than peeling away layers of ambiguity until you are left with a core of true meaning within, it is possible without struggling after a definitive interpretation to explore multiple meanings that are allowed to remain irreconcilable. Such an approach will avoid oversimplification, and will permit a constructive clash of opposites that should lead to greater insight and wider perspectives.

*Puzzle-solving: the riddle of Revelation.*

The indecipherability of the Biblical Apocalypse (one of its principal fascinations for Lawrence) is a key issue addressed in the scholarly works he read on the subject: notably James Pryse's *The Apocalypse Unsealed* and Dr. John Oman's *Book of Revelation*. Both these works engage in what may be termed an 'intertextual' analysis of the Biblical text of Revelation, offering interpretations that might 'explain' or disentangle its intricate message. Pryse emphasises its enigmatic nature, suggesting that the text has the status of an unresolved puzzle, even in modern times:

At the present time, the *Apocalypse* is the despair of theology; the ablest scholars in the ranks of orthodoxy frankly admit that it must be regarded as an unsolved, and possibly insoluble, enigma. They translate its title 'Revelation'—yet it reveals nothing to them...nor is any book in all literature more heavily veiled.

Yet the *Apocalypse* is the key to the *New Testament*...  
(Pryse, 1910, p.2)

Pryse, reacting like Lawrence against the 'system of dogmatic theology formulated from the literal interpretation, the dead letter, of the books of the *Old and New Testaments*' (Pryse, 1910, p.2) attempts an 'unsealing' of the apocalyptic language and symbolism. He identifies in the text 'very clear intimations of a secret traditional lore, an arcane science, handed down from times immemorial' (Pryse, 1910, p.1).

In other words, Pryse assumes that Revelation contains a carefully encoded message, and that a series of 'ingenious puzzles which have baffled the profane for so many centuries' were necessary to prevent the book from an otherwise inevitable censorship by the esoteric Church:

If [the author] had written the book in clear language, it would undoubtedly have been destroyed; and it certainly could never have found a place in the Christian canon. It would seem, therefore, a reasonable supposition that he wrote the *Apocalypse* for the purpose



of preserving that doctrine in the Christian records, carefully concealing it under the most extraordinary symbols, checked off by a numerical key and by similar 'puzzles,' so that the meanings could be conclusively demonstrated from the text itself, and concluding it with a dread imprecation against any one who should add or take away anything from the book... (Pryse, 1910, pp.3-4)

Revelation is, in Pryse's view, a text that dissimulates, masks and conceals, though its concealment does not in any way lead to disorder. On the contrary, the text is marvellously ingenious, 'weaving [diverse] materials into a harmonious whole, wonderfully systematic and complete, and having all the details worked out with painstaking exactness' (Pryse, 1910, p.34). It is thus perfect in construction: 'In its orderly arrangement and concise statement the book is a model of precise literary workmanship' (Pryse, 1910, pp.24-5).

Pryse's very way of interpreting Revelation, in which 'the meanings could be conclusively demonstrated from the text itself', suggests a secret code that could be unearthed and deciphered. As in the decoding methodology offered by Michael Riffaterre, the text is envisaged as a network of puzzles, problems or ambiguities which must be tackled by the puzzle-solving critic. The text's 'ungrammaticalities' must be resolved, and the gaps filled in. Pryse asserts that the meaning of Revelation is 'so impregnably intrenched behind symbolism, allegory, anagram, number-words, and other puzzling devices, that it has successfully withstood the assaults of "those without" (the exotericists) for nearly two millenniums' (Pryse, 1910, p.80). He assumes that Revelation has 'a meaning', and implies that this meaning is recoverable, if it can be extricated from the symbolism and puzzles that surround it:

the *Apocalypse* contains its own key, and is complete in itself, coherent, and scrupulously accurate in every detail. The puzzles it contains are not intended to mislead or confuse; on the contrary, they serve to verify the correct interpretation of the allegory. The book is not sealed to any one who has the developed intuitive faculty...

(Pryse, 1910, p.219)

It is in its decipherability that Revelation remains distinct from other more obscure mystical writings. Pryse assumes that there is meaning within meaning, rather than meaning against meaning. His job as critic is the 'unfolding' (Pryse, 1910, p.219) he describes.

Like Pryse, Dr. John Oman felt himself 'baffled by a problem' when faced by the text of Revelation, but one stemming from his recognition that 'no method of interpretation—historical, allegorical, mythological, astrological—gives it any connected or reasonable meaning' (Oman, 1923, p.vii). While Pryse credits Revelation with ingenuity and coherence, Oman proceeds from the assumption that the text itself is corrupt and disordered, thus requiring reorganisation of a radical kind, rather than simply insightful interpretation:

That there is some disorder in the text of the Apocalypse is as near a certainty as a literary question can well be.

The evidence is plainest towards the end of the book. Nations need healing (xxii. 2) after pain and sorrow have passed for ever (xxi. 4); the unclean and idolaters and hypocrites must be kept out of the Holy City (xxi. 27) after they have all perished in the lake of fire (xxi. 8); this holy city comes (xxi. 9), but the saints already sit in it on thrones (xx. 7); the Last Judgement and the Eternal State must close the book. (Oman, 1923, p.1)

Oman offers various explanations of the way in which (for example) sections conform or fail to conform to a certain structure or pattern, ranging from the supposition that the MS sheets have at some stage 'suffered disarrangement' to the theory that 'the sections originally were not equal, but have been made so by the editor' (Oman, 1923, p.8). Oman's reordering of the book is in part an attempt to eradicate what he sees as the harmful intervention of this hypothetically wilful editor in order to restore the author's original text:

Our next task, which is to discover the true order of the sheets, is made difficult mainly by the persistence of the impression of the book as arranged and expounded by the editor. When we are once rid of his ideas, the ideas of the author become reasonably clear and the main



outlines at least of the order in which he has developed them reasonably certain. (Oman, 1923, p.15)

The above seems to express a certainty and conviction regarding the nature of the editorial imposition, and the appropriate methods that might counteract such interference. However, this certainty seems belied by the further explanation that the final order 'was arrived at by putting the sections of the Greek text...on separate sheets and arranging them purely by what seemed to be their natural sequence. No regard was paid to the order in the present text, because it then appeared as though the editor had found the MS. he copied in utter confusion'. The completed text 'did not depend upon arguments, but upon a general impression of the sequence of the book' (Oman, 1923, pp.16-7). The unashamed subjectivity of the reordering process is evident here, as in Oman's need to account for and explain 'the peculiar place which has been assigned in the new order to the material which interrupts the old' (Oman, 1923, p.20).

Lawrence, in his review of Oman's book, recognises the subjectivity of Oman's reordering and assigns a motive to it: namely 'the idea that the theme is the conflict between true and false religion, false religion being established upon the Beast of world empire' (Lawrence, 1980, p.41). Lawrence responds positively to Oman's book as an interpretation:

Dr. Oman's rearrangement and his exposition give one a good deal of satisfaction. The main drift we can surely accept. John's passionate and mystic hatred of the civilization of his day, a hatred so intense only because he knew that the living realities of men's being were displaced by it, is something to which the soul answers now again. (Lawrence, 1980, p.41)

Lawrence, also possessed by a 'mystic hatred of the civilization of his day' would undoubtedly have found Oman's account of John's motivation congenial.

However, Lawrence goes on to assert that the interpretation, however satisfying, is not and cannot be definitive; for to afford it definitive status would be to diminish the nature of the apocalyptic text, and the symbolic method through which its insights are conveyed:

we cannot agree that Dr. Oman's explanation of the Apocalypse is exhaustive. No explanation of symbols is final. Symbols are not intellectual quantities, they are not to be exhausted by the intellect.

And an Apocalypse has, must have, is intended to have various levels or layers or strata of meaning...

Why should Doctor Oman oppose the view that, besides the drama of the fall of World Rule and the triumph of the Word, there is another drama, or rather several other concurrent dramas?...

As a matter of fact, old symbols have many meanings, and we only define one meaning in order to leave another undefined. So with the meaning of the Book of Revelation. Hence the inexhaustibility of its attraction. (Lawrence, 1980, pp.41-2)

Lawrence's attitude to his scholarly sources (as expressed both in his review and elsewhere) is explicable in terms of his assertion that 'The Apocalypse is a strange and mysterious book. One therefore welcomes any serious work upon it'. The text is inexhaustible in its interest and fascination because of the multiplicity of meanings; and the value of each critical text responding to it is that each offers a single but invaluable perspective, thus expounding or illuminating one meaning, or one stratum of meaning. The later scholar then responds to the 'hints' offered, without being restricted to the same interpretation, but taking the insights offered as a starting-point from which it is possible to proceed. A text such as Revelation, which provoked such widely divergent responses as those of Pryse, Oman and Frederick Carter, was fascinating for Lawrence in its expansiveness, and in its consequent ability to liberate the imagination prepared to engage with it at one of its deepest levels.

Lawrence, in his review of Oman's book and in his discussion of various intertexts in *Apocalypse*, engages interestingly with the subject of influence and assimilation by which texts interact and affect each other. He discusses texts which are themselves intertextually engaged in an interpretation



of Revelation; and his consideration of this process reflects on his own participation in an intertextual continuum. Lawrence's theorising anticipates reader-response criticism, in which the emphasis is thrown onto the subjective engagement of the reader or critic responding to a text, rather than a core 'meaning' which is the product of an authorial intention. His prioritising of 'meaning against meaning' over 'meaning within meaning' undermines any sense of a holistic, authorially-regulated text, replacing it with an interpretative continuum in which - as in rotary-image thought (see Lawrence, 1980, pp.96-7) - there is no definite solution to the puzzle, in fact no 'puzzle' set by an author (or by accident) at all, and consequently no 'nauseating fixity'.

*Lawrence and Frederick Carter: an intertextual dialogue.*

Directly, *Apocalypse* dates back to 1923 when Lawrence while staying in Taos, New Mexico, first entered into correspondence with the English painter and mystic Frederick Carter, who had written to him in December 1922, asking him to look at his manuscript and drawings on the symbolism of Revelation (see Kalnins, 1995, p.3). In his 'Introduction to *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*' Lawrence describes the feelings of liberation which he found provoked by this initial contact with Carter's work:

I also remember very vividly my first experience of the astrological heavens, reading Frederick Carter's *Dragon*: the sense of being the macrocosm, the great sky with its meaningful stars and its profoundly meaningful motions, its wonderful bodily vastness, not empty, but all alive and doing..And since I am not afraid to feel my own nothingness in front of the vast void of astronomical space, neither am I afraid to feel my own splendidity in the zodiacal heavens.

(Lawrence, 1980, pp.46-7)

Lawrence was struck by the liberating nature of Carter's prose text, as well as the series of Blakean designs reflecting various aspects of the astrological heavens. Yet Carter's work was itself going through a complex intertextual

process of revision and alteration. The initial chapters of the manuscript that Lawrence saw in 1923 (along with the drawings) were published as *Dragon of the Alchemists* in 1926; the book subsequently became *The Dragon of the Apocalypse; The Dragon of Revelation*, published in 1931; then *Symbols of Revelation*, published in 1934.

Interestingly, Lawrence retrospectively favoured the version of the *Dragon* that he read first in 1923-24:

The *Dragon* as it exists now is no longer the *Dragon* which I read in Mexico. It has been made more—more argumentative, shall we say. Give me the old manuscript and let me write an introduction to that! I urge. But: No, says Carter. It isn't *sound*.

Sound what? He means his old astrological theory of the Apocalypse was not sound, as it was exposed in the old manuscript. But who cares? We do not care, vitally, about theories of the Apocalypse: what the Apocalypse means. What we care about is the release of the imagination. A real release of the imagination renews our strength and our vitality, makes us feel stronger and happier.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.47)

Lawrence valued the book as one which could provoke a liberating imaginary or visionary response. To derive an image from the essay 'Chaos in Poetry', Lawrence believed that the book slashed through the old patched parasol protecting man from the implications of visionary insight, and created (quite literally in the case of this astrological work) 'a window to the sun'. The effect of the initial *Dragon* on Lawrence was like that of Harry Crosby's poetry collection *Chariot of the Sun*, which, despite being at times semantically nonsensical, creates insight through its symbolism that may be apprehended by sense-consciousness rather than the more limited mental consciousness. Lawrence described Carter's book using terms similar to those he employed in the 'Chaos in Poetry' essay:

It was confused: it was, in a sense, a chaos. And it hadn't very much to do with St. John's Revelation. But that didn't matter to me. I was very often smothered in words. And then would come a page, or a chapter,



that would release my imagination and give me a whole great sky to move in.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.45)

Lawrence resented Carter's book becoming more scholarly and 'sound': although ironically the changes may well have resulted in part from the collaboration with Lawrence, and through the consequent exposure to other 'scholarly' texts and ideas which themselves informed Lawrence's writing in his *Apocalypse*. Probably in response to Carter's promptings and recommendations Lawrence had ordered numerous scholarly texts in preparation for the writing of his own book,

which included editions of the Bible, R.H. Charles's scholarly *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, *L'Apocalypse de Jean* by A. Loisy, Hesiod, Plutarch and Dean Inge's lectures on Plotinus, which he read for their accounts of ancient cosmology and cosmogony. (Kalnins, 1995, p.15)

Lawrence (as in his preparation for writing *Sketches*) felt that a thorough familiarity with the available scholarly literature was necessary before he could proceed satisfactorily. So although Lawrence's principal literary debt was owed to Carter, these sources (as well as the texts by Pryse and Oman I have already discussed) must also be acknowledged, and it is necessary to consider Lawrence's late writings as a dialogue with these multiple and diverse literary precursors.

It is significant, though, that Lawrence's book would not have existed if Carter had not contacted him again in 1929 in Bandol with the request that Lawrence should write a foreword to a new version of the *Dragon*. The significance of Carter's role in Lawrence's writing on Revelation is emphasised in the rather aggrieved publisher's note that appears in the 1931 edition of *The Dragon of Revelation*, in which the publisher tries to re-establish Carter's text as the driving force behind Lawrence's book (which had been published earlier in the same year). He quotes a long letter published in the *Times Literary*

*Supplement* on 2 July 1931, which was written in response to a request made by a man who had just reviewed the 1931 Florence edition of *Apocalypse*. This reviewer had complained that the edition of *Apocalypse* gave no indication of the date or origin of Lawrence's text; and the TLS letter set out to explain the consequences of this ignorance:

This circumstance leads your reviewer to ascribe to Lawrence a knowledge of very many things that he derived from Mr. Carter rather than from his own 'wide reading.' Lawrence's opinions were, of course, though based on facts supplied by Mr. Carter, undeniably his own, and, indeed, though in the main coincident, yet in certain instances opposed to those of his friend. Yet it cannot be denied that Lawrence's *Apocalypse* would never have been written had Lawrence not had access to Mr. Carter's work.

(Hanchant and Clement, 1931, p.528)

Undeniably it was in response to the overtures of Carter who 'sent Lawrence some rewritten material for a new book, suggesting a collaboration' that Lawrence returned enthusiastically to his study of Revelation and apocalyptic literature.

Carter visited Lawrence in mid-November 1929 and stayed until the end of the month: a fact which supports my supposition that at this time Lawrence abandoned his poetry-writing and devoted all his time to *Apocalypse*. In her introduction, Kalnins describes the development of Lawrence's writing at this time:

By the time [Carter] left, Lawrence had written 20,000 words on Revelation and in mid-December he wrote to Carter: 'I have roughly finished my introduction, and am going over it, working it a bit into shape.' He was still revising the manuscript before Christmas, but between then and 6 January 1930 he abandoned the original plan of recasting what now totalled nearly 25,000 words (with another 20,000 of deleted material...) into an introduction for Carter's new book. Instead, he had the manuscript typed over the Christmas holidays and early in January wrote a new, short introduction for Carter. However, Carter did not include it in his book, now called *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*, and the introduction was finally published posthumously as a separate essay in *The London Mercury* of July 1930. The long



first introduction became Lawrence's last book, *Apocalypse*. He did not live to revise it. (Kalnins, 1995, p.17)

Thus Lawrence's writing on *Apocalypse* began as an introduction to the work of another author, but then assumed an existence and identity of its own, as a result of Lawrence's developing fascination for the subject. It was a product of a genuine cross-fertilisation of ideas that occurred verbally as well as in the writings of both men, and was also linked to the writing which Lawrence had been doing before Carter's arrival in Bandol.

The collaboration reveals the intertextual complexity of the concurrently developing apocalyptic writing and thinking of Lawrence and Carter after 1923-24. Lawrence's debt to Carter is obvious; yet how much do, for instance, Carter's apocalyptic books published in 1931 and 1934 owe to Lawrence's influence? If Carter was the initial impetus behind Lawrence's writing on Revelation, the texts published by Carter after Lawrence's death were both directly and profoundly affected by the intensive period of collaboration experienced in November 1929, and arguably also by Carter's subsequent reading of Lawrence's manuscript or published book. Thus the two writers in their collaboration entered into a genuine duality, a creation and exchange of meaning, which (to apply Lawrence's sense of the positive nature of such duality) may well have provided the contraries that provoked insight and development beyond the limitations of an individual psyche or intellect.

### *Carter and Lawrence: symbolism and the psyche.*

Lawrence's prolonged discussion of symbols throughout all his apocalyptic writings is in part a reflection provoked directly by his response to the Biblical text of Revelation, and in part a dialogic response to Frederick Carter. Lawrence may have been led to consider the symbolic nature of the Apocalypse initially when reading Carter's passages on symbolism in the MS given to him in 1923, which then became a chapter entitled 'Symbol' in *The Dragon of the*

*Alchemists* (1926). Carter, like Lawrence, emphasises the significance of symbolism or what he calls 'image making' by reflecting on the paucity of genuine, deep-rooted symbols: 'of symbols, deeply established in the mind and consciousness, [there are] but few' (Carter, 1926, p.22). He attributes a 'peculiar force in the "unconscious" mind' to the symbol, referring also to its 'power to set free emotion, to induce a mood or mode of thinking' (Carter, 1926, p.11). Like Lawrence again, Carter considers the necessary receptivity with which an individual must engage with a symbol. For those 'of narrow, overmaterial mind, and habit of thought' any attempt at response will be futile,

But to the mind capable of apprehending association and analogies of an extensive order, it is a guide and director to paths of advancement in such knowledge. Thus the symbol in its religious or mystical aspect is the medium between the exterior physical universe and the interior world of thought: it is a symbol in that it gives a true relation.

(Carter, 1926, pp.27-28)

It is through symbols (Carter asserts) that it is possible to achieve 'a true balance or equilibrium of the physical world relative to the psychical'. Lawrence was struggling, particularly in 1928-30, to find a way in which his writing might articulate a living connection between man and the physical universe or cosmos, thus achieving balance or equilibrium. In *Last Poems* Lawrence attempts to do what Carter here suggests is possible: he uses images and symbols in their religious or mystical aspect as a medium in his exploration of possible relations between man's interior world of thought and the exterior physical universe.

In *The Dragon of the Alchemists* those who use and respond appropriately to images are visionaries who perceive the external world through 'their marvellous and resplendent web of metaphor and symbol' (Carter, 1926, p.28), artists, and more specifically poets. Carter describes the early nineteenth century as a 'mystical-minded age of great poets and great adventurers, in life as in thought' (Carter, 1926, p.14), referring to the 'ebbing



enchantment' of the 'realms of dream' which 'laid close hold on a few—on Shelley, on Coleridge, on Wordsworth, as a little earlier on Blake' (Carter, 1926, p.13). Carter's approach to mysticism and symbolism often becomes psychological or psychoanalytical in keeping with his expressed aim in the book: 'the resolution of the psychological meaning of the Dragon with its kindred and associated symbols'. He is concerned, as is Lawrence, with the way in which symbols provoke responses in different levels of consciousness, or sub-consciousness.

Carter feels that such psychology explains some aspects of great writers and great works:

To know the psychological machinery or formulae of the writers of many of the most splendid and profound works in our language, it is necessary to apprehend the basic order of their ideas upon man's relation to the universe. That the stars were much in their thought it is unnecessary to prove; quotation could be piled on quotation to show how freely and closely astrological terms and their readiest comparisons came together. (Carter, 1926, p.18)

According to Carter 'The poet was a stargazer, and found in his heaven the images of perfection' (Carter, 1926, p.19). He asserts that both literature and religion can be best comprehended and explained in astrological terms: so his approach is that of conscious return to an ancient mode of apprehending and relating to the heavens. His conception of return is strikingly similar to that of Lawrence, though Lawrence does not have such an astrological bias. Carter states that the 'thinkers of ancient times' occupied a relation to the cosmos that has been lost in our modern world, yet could be instructive to us. Like Lawrence he is in revolt against the conceited modern assumption that ancient people living 'breast to breast' with the cosmos and the heavens (in Lawrence's terms: see Lawrence, 1980, p.132) were less intelligent and more ignorantly superstitious than we are today. He feels that for the appreciation of the possible correspondence between the older speculation on the mystical meaning

of the heavenly signs and an examination of astrology from a psychological standpoint,

it is necessary to assume that the thinkers of ancient times were of a mentality equal to ours and not appreciably more superstitious than we are to-day. (Carter, 1926, p.22)

The ancient thinkers whom Carter invokes 'regarded the spirit of man to be as old as the universe, descending through the immensities of the heavens into being and life on earth'. In Carter's account they postulated a conception of humanity which was quite literally reliant on and bound up with the heavenly bodies in all respects:

In their opinion, a human being's birth had a relation to the whole universe conditioned by the moment of time at which it took place. Its tendencies, mental and physical, came into being and were even to be read in the position and relation of the signs and planets of the heavens. (Carter, 1926, p.20)

Carter takes this to the extent of arguing that 'the whole mind's book of symbols is given compactly in the stars' (Carter, 1926, p.21). It is thus through a conscious return or reversion to the ancient conception of the heavenly bodies that the mythopoeic or imaginative workings of man's mind will be liberated, resulting in visionary illumination. Carter recognises that to most modern readers 'these absurd superstitions in things alchemical and astrological are of little consequence, and far out of their habit of mind' (Carter, 1926, p.18); but he feels that they are no less valuable as a consequence. His 'return' is one that Lawrence advocates and follows in his own reaching back to the astrological cosmology and symbolism so prevalent in his late works. Such a conceptual return, in Lawrence's view, might be capable of providing modern man with a new habit of mind and vision: a 'window to the sun'. It is with this aim in mind that Lawrence - in *Last Poems* and also in *Apocalypse* - imaginatively inhabits a version of Carter's ancient world of astrological



symbolism, and writes about the ways to establish a new, meaningful connection. What Lawrence acquired was not, of course, what Carter would have desired, but what he incidentally provided.

The significance of symbols in Lawrence's thinking about the power of Revelation is evident throughout his principal apocalyptic writings. His ideas are found in embryonic form in the early Oman review, written in February 1924, which 'reveals Lawrence's fundamental ideas about the inexhaustible nature of symbols' (Kalnins, 1995, p.14). They are most prominent, however, in the 'Introduction to *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*' written as late as January 1930. Perhaps as a result of Pryse's reference to the Apocalypse as 'one of the most stupendous allegories ever penned by the hand of man' (Pryse, 1910, p.66), Lawrence is here determined to differentiate between allegory and symbolism, and to assign Revelation to the latter category. He considers allegory to be limited, using images to express definite qualities, and assigning each image to a fixed place in a moral or didactic argument. Symbols, by contrast, allow for interpretative flexibility and liberation of response. They are, in Lawrence's conception of them, alive:

You can't give a great symbol a 'meaning', any more than you can give a cat a 'meaning'. Symbols are organic units of consciousness with a life of their own, and you can never explain them away, because their value is dynamic, emotional, belonging to the sense-consciousness of the body and soul, and not simply mental.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.48)

Symbols (described by Lawrence as the images of myth) 'stand for units of human *feeling*, human experience', with the power to 'arouse the deep emotional self, and the dynamic self, beyond comprehension'. The power of symbols is a result of their antiquity and the cumulative process by which they become increasingly rich and significant:

Many ages of accumulated experience still throb within a symbol. And we throb in response. It takes centuries to create a really significant

symbol...No man can invent symbols. He can invent an emblem, made up of images: or metaphors: or images: but not symbols. Some images, in the course of many generations of men, become symbols, embedded in the soul and ready to start alive when touched, carried on in the human consciousness for centuries. And again, when men become unresponsive and half dead, symbols die.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.49)

The appeal of the Apocalypse for Lawrence is that it contains 'many splendid old symbols, to make us throb' (Lawrence, 1980, p.49).

*Unsealing the symbols of Revelation: Pryse, Oman, Inge and Carter.*

The symbols of Revelation are interpreted variously by the writers who influenced Lawrence between 1917 and 1930. I will begin by considering some of these interpretations (relating to the key symbols of sun, moon and dragon) before exploring Lawrence's use of these particular symbols both in *Last Poems* and in his subsequent apocalyptic prose writings.

In his systematic unsealing of Revelation, Pryse refers to customs related to specific Greek gods, as in his commentary on V. 11-14:

The three paeans chanted in praise of the Conqueror and his God are in accordance with the Greek custom of chanting paeans to Apollo, the Sun-God, before and after battle or before any solemn undertaking; and they are very appropriate here, since the Conqueror, the Lion-Lamb, stands for the Nous, or microcosmic Sun...

(Pryse, 1910, p.121)

According to Pryse the sun is a crucial symbol in Revelation; and his interpretation of its multiple applications exemplifies the potential of a symbol to assume, and modulate through, a plethora of meanings. In his puzzle-solving of the Apocalypse, Pryse is always searching for meanings within meanings, and at the core he usually finds the sun, in one manifestation or another. He sees it as primordial and all-encompassing: the seven sacred planets 'only represent seven aspects of the Sun' (Pryse, 1910, p.67), while 'In the



benediction [in VII. 9-12] the attributes of all the seven planets are ascribed to the Sun-God' (Pryse, 1910, p.132). The sun seems to provide a useful 'core' for Pryse as a puzzle-solving critic, for in his interpretation it is made to represent or signify almost everything

The flexibility of the sun symbol in Pryse's account of Revelation might be attributed to its appearance in different symbolic 'aspects'. It can both adopt and be adopted by these diverse 'aspects': in X. 1-4 the Divinity described is 'the intellectual Sun, in its aspect as Kronos, the God of Time' (Pryse, 1910, p. p.143); while in II. 18-29 'the Logos has the aspect of Helios (the Sun)', thus becoming a hybrid Sun-Logos' (Pryse, 1910, p.105). The Biblical figure which appears among lampstands, holding seven stars, and with a two-edged sword emanating from his mouth is 'a fanciful picture of the Sun as the *Panaugeia*, or fount of all-radiating light' (Pryse, 1910, p.89), a 'figure of the Sun as the ruler of the planets' and simultaneously 'a symbol of the incarnated Self, the Second Logos' (Pryse, 1910, p.91). In IX. 13-15, Pryse interprets the 'golden altar' in terms of its solar significance: 'Gold is the metal of the sun, and the four-horned altar is but a different symbol for the sun and the regents of the four quarters' (Pryse, 1910, p.141).

The sun is crucial to Pryse's argument regarding the biological psyche, as is evident when he expounds his interpretation of the 'seventh seal' or 'conarium', 'its zodiacal correspondence being Leo, which is the house of the Sun' (Pryse, 1910, p.46):

As the sun enters each sign of the zodiac it is said, astrologically, to 'conquer' the sign and to assimilate its particular quality; and the same is said of the *kundalini* as it passes through the *chakras*. Hence the hero of the *Apocalypse*, who is the Nous, or microcosmic Sun, is called 'the Conqueror.' (Pryse, 1910, p.97)

Thus he uses the relation of the sun to the zodiacal signs as an analogy for the way in which the kundalini of the body operates in relation to the chakras. Perhaps the largest claim he makes regarding the sun's significance in this

regard is that the Apocalypse has as its 'sole theme' the rebirth into an 'imperishable solar body'. Finally, Pryse often emphasises the leonine aspect of the sun, both when referring directly to the zodiacal signs in such statements as 'The Sun is the Lion when domiciled in Leo' (Pryse, 1910, p.169), and when assigning characteristics to Biblical figures, such as the horsemen of IX, 16-21, whose 'solar character' is indicated by 'the lion-heads of the horses' (Pryse, 1910, p.142).

In *The Book of Revelation* Oman argues for links between astrology and primitive cults or rituals in an attempt to articulate his theory regarding the astrological symbolism of Revelation. He discerns pagan ritual behind the ostensible Christian dogma, in a way that prefigures what Lawrence was to do, and which probably influenced it:

Pouring the vial on the sun at least suggests sun-worship and the turning of the god into the destroyer. (Oman, 1923, p.126)

Lawrence does not usually relate the sun to specific deities or mythologies as he wishes to get back to a Chaldean conception of the cosmos which predates named, specific deities in fixed relation to astrological phenomena. Yet it may be that his depiction of such deities as Dionysos and Osiris in his late writings was influenced by their association with astrological or cosmic symbols. In his *Lectures on Plotinus* (one of the major texts on Lawrence's apocalyptic book-list) Dean Inge refers to Dionysus and Orpheus as 'two nearly connected forms of the Sun-god', and goes on to say of the Egyptian Osiris that 'his resemblance to Dionysus was close enough to tempt many to identify them' (Inge, 1941, p.57). Inge relates these 'forms of the Sun-god' to the ceremonies of death and rebirth, involving 'the rending in pieces of the god or hero, the lament for him, his resurrection, and the communion of his flesh and blood as a 'medicine of immortality' (Inge, 1941, p.57). Part two of 'The Escaped Cock' engages directly with the mystery-cult of Osiris as a dying and reviving god, and when the Christ-figure experiences a new birth through sexual arousal



Lawrence writes 'A new sun was coming up in him, in the perfect inner darkness of himself' and 'his own sun dawned, and sent its fire running along his limbs, so that his face shone unconsciously' (Lawrence, 1960, pp.168-89). Osiris does not feature prominently in *Last Poems*; yet Dionysos is a returning or resurrected god who reappears in his ship during the poems concerned with the mythopoeic crossing of the 'Minoan distance'. Poems such as 'Shadows' articulate the 'hope of mystical death and renewal...based on the analogy of nature's processes of death and rebirth' (Inge, 1941, p.57). Such passages in Inge's book may have provoked Lawrence to consider the possible interrelations between his previous thinking on primitive cultures in response to the anthropological texts of Tylor and Frazer, and his new preoccupation with astrology and cosmology derived from apocalyptic intertexts.

The symbol which so fascinated Carter that it became the focus of every version of his book, was that of the dragon, which (among its multiple resonances and associations) assumes the aspect of the sun and moon. In *The Dragon of the Alchemists* Carter asserts that 'in the opinion of the alchemical writers, the Dragon was significant of the Sun and the Moon in a state of change' (Carter, 1926, p.14). The Dragon both signifies and embodies change, and its mystery and fascination stem directly from this attribute:

He who can hold and examine the history of this baleful changing monster, still hidden in the strange deep of the universal psyche, may find, so the stories promise, by its mastery, strange and marvellous treasure, and knowledge beyond that of the magicians of the market place. (Carter, 1926, p.15)

The 'baleful changing monster' suggests a symbol that modulates constantly through different forms and aspects, and which is therefore subject to infinite interpretations.

The richness and complexity of the dragon symbol becomes evident on consideration of some of its diverse aspects. Carter emphasises this diversity by

referring to the dragon's multiple appearances in wide-ranging mythological settings:

The Dragon held the same mysterious importance in [the alchemical writers'] philosophical system as it held in all myths, as it holds in the story of the 'fall of man' in the history of Hercules, Siegfried, St. George, and Perseus. As the serpent in the dream life of to-day, it maintains the same fascination of terror and formidable knowledge.

(Carter, 1926, pp.14-15)

The flexibility and potency of the Dragon symbol that is suggested above also becomes evident on consideration of its diverse manifestations in the text of Revelation. The apocalyptic Dragon is not only a figurative 'serpent' in our dreams; it also correlates directly with Satan, the serpent responsible for the fall of mankind. Carter refers to the Dragon as the 'serpent' in Paradise: the embodiment of the 'dark power that lay in wait, and brought about the primary separation, and accounted for the fallen state of man' (Carter, 1926, p.23). This interpretation derives from the explicit Biblical description of 'that old serpent called the Devil, and Satan' as 'the huge dragon' (Moffatt, 1926, p.330, XII.9: quoted in Lawrence, 1980, p.119 as 'the great dragon'). Pryse also makes this association, when he describes the fall of Satan as follows: 'Hurled down was the great Dragon, the archaic Snake, who is called the "Accuser" and the "Adversary," the deluder of the whole inhabited earth'.

Yet in Pryse's conception too the Dragon symbol is multi-faceted, and thus not purely evil or destructive. Hence the proliferation of dragons, enabling the symbol to incorporate the antitheses of good and evil, light and dark, in his commentary on XII. 7-12:

The creative Logos is the Dragon of Light, or Day-Sun; and Satan, the Adversary, is the Dragon of Darkness, or Night-Sun.

(Pryse, 1910, p.159)

As in the case of the sun and moon symbols in Carter, the Dragon also assumes a specific significance in relation to Pryse's theory of the biological psyche. The



Dragon represents 'the glamour of sensuous life'; and the 'seven heads' which at one point he is said to possess are related to the 'seven cardinal desires' which 'energize through the seven *chakras* of the physical body during incarnation' (Pryse, 1910, p.58). The symbol is further complicated by Pryse's reference to the Dragon later in the same paragraph as 'the eighth, a sort of by-product of the seven' and also as 'the phantom which forms after the final purification', whose 'fate is to disintegrate in the nether-world' (Pryse, 1910, pp.58-9). Such divergent and seemingly contradictory interpretations of this principal symbol again adhere to Lawrence's sense of the symbol as flexible in the way that allegory cannot be. We encounter 'meaning against meaning', and must accept the resulting clash of images and associations as profitable and thought-provoking, rather than merely confused and chaotic.

In *Apocalypse* Lawrence, following the Bible, Carter and Pryse in emphasising the correlation between dragon and serpent, asserts that this composite symbol goes 'so deep in every human consciousness, that a rustle in the grass can startle the toughest "modern" to depths he has no control over' (Lawrence, 1980, p.123). He makes the dragon 'the symbol of the fluid, rapid, startling movement of life within us. That startled life which runs through us like a serpent, or coils within us potent and waiting, like a serpent' (Lawrence, 1980, p.123). Here the 'serpent' association is positive: it is the image derived from yoga of the serpent or dragon coiled as the base of the spine that Lawrence describes in *Fantasia*, and, even more significantly, in *Women in Love*, soon after first reading Pryse. Like Pryse, Lawrence evokes the dragon in different symbolic aspects, and as a result ends up with multiple dragons, identifiable this time by colour. The red dragon is 'the kakodaimon, the dragon in his evil or inimical aspect' (Lawrence, 1980, p.125); while 'The long green dragon with which we are so familiar on Chinese things is the dragon in his good aspect of life-bringer, life-maker, vivifier' (Lawrence, 1980, p.124).

The dragon is 'personal' in the sense of existing as a potentiality coiled within each of us. Yet Lawrence emphasises that the dragon symbol more often has macrocosmic, rather than microcosmic, significance:

The usual vision of the dragon is, however, not personal but cosmic. It is in the vast cosmos of the stars that the dragon writhes and lashes. We see him in his maleficent aspect, red. But don't let us forget that when he stirs green and flashing on a pure dark night of stars it is he who makes the wonder of the night, it is the full rich coiling of his folds which makes the heavens sumptuously serene, as he glides around and guards the immunity, the precious strength of the planets, and gives lustre and new strength to the fixed stars...

(Lawrence, 1980, p.124)

The 'cosmic' aspect of the dragon in which the symbol is associated with the zodiacal signs and constellations is also an aspect considered by Pryse and Oman, in particular in their interpretations of the woman who is clothed with the sun, standing on the moon and crowned with twelve stars; and the dragon figure that sweeps down a third of the stars in heaven with his tail. Oman refers to an astrological interpretation in which 'the sign of the woman and the dragon' are 'the constellations of Virgo and Draco' (Oman, 1923, p.116); while Pryse says that 'This constellatory symbol is Draco, the pole Dragon, which has seven distinguishing stars, and which, as depicted in the ancient star-maps, extends over seven of the zodiacal signs' (Pryse, 1910, p.156). So the Biblical Dragon, seems - like the sun symbol - to derive much of its potency from the Chaldean star-lore underlying Revelation's ostensible Christian 'meaning'.

***Using the symbols of Revelation: Last Poems, Apocalypse and 'Introduction to The Dragon of the Apocalypse'.***

A good deal of the ideas, interpretations and images outlined above found their way into Lawrence's poetry writing of 1929-30. Here Lawrence establishes the sun as a dominant and potent symbol, as if in an attempt to regain it or restore



it to its true status. The poem 'Forte dei Marmi' contains the exhortation: 'Let me tell you that the sun is alive, and can be angry' (Lawrence, MS1, p.18; 1993a, p.625). In 'Kissing and Horrid Strife' the sun is invested with animacy and stands in a living relation to the cosmos:

And life is for delight, and bliss  
like now when the white sun kisses the sea  
and plays with the wavelets like a panther playing with its cubs ...  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.18; 1993a, p.709)

The sun, in its intimate relation to the cosmos, is also inevitably bound up with all sensuous experience, such as the eating of an apple described in the poem 'Mystic'. In this poem the 'insistence of the sun' can be tasted in a 'good apple'; while 'some apples taste preponderantly of water, wet and sour / and some of too much sun, brackish sweet / like lagoon-water, that has been too much sunned' (Lawrence, MS2, p.17; 1993a, pp.707-8). This poem emphasises how the sun can be experienced or felt directly through sensory perception: a method of responding that is the antithesis of the abstract thought-form-making described later in *Apocalypse* (I will consider this in detail later in this section).

In the poem 'Bells' which describes a tribal summons, the sun is associated specifically with the non-verbal, non-mental communication of ancient peoples: 'The soft thudding of drums / of fingers or fists or soft-skinned sticks upon the stretched membrane of sound / sends summons in the old hollows of the sun' (Lawrence, MS1, p.17; 1993a, p.623). The sun's 'old hollows' may be filled not only with sounds but also with numerous although often unspecified gods. In 'Sunset', for instance, 'some god of evening' leans out of the 'band of dull gold in the west' 'again and again', and 'shares being' with the receptive observer (Lawrence, MS1, p.40; 1993a, p.656). The sun can also imply god or gods as well as containing them: in the poem 'The Body of God' the manifestations of god include 'women brushing their hair in the sun' (Lawrence, MS2, p.4; 1993a, p.691).

Perhaps following Pryse, Lawrence describes the sun as the house of Leo, so that it is defined according to its leonine appearance and attributes. In 'The Argonauts', 'the sun, like a lion, licks his paws / and goes slowly down the hill' (Lawrence, MS2, p.1; 1993a, p.687); while 'Invocation to the Moon' refers to the 'golden house of the sun' that the narrator has left behind, after receiving 'one warm kind kiss of the lion with golden paws' (Lawrence, MS2, p.7; 1993a, p.695). In 'Prayer' the sun's hostile aspect is conveyed through its leonine appearance: 'For the sun is hostile, now / his face is like the red lion' (Lawrence, MS1, p.69; 1993a, p.684). It is the potential hostility of the leonine sun that surfaces in reaction against modern man's inability to establish vital contact with the heavenly bodies, for 'The sun can rot as well as ripen', and many neurotic people become more and more neurotic, the browner and 'healthier' they become by sun-baking (Lawrence, 1980, pp.51-2). The poems 'Forte dei Marmi' and 'Sea-bathers' pick up on this notion of the sun's potential harmfulness, its capacity to rot as well as ripen. The former describes how 'the reddening sun / reddens still more on the blatant bodies of these all-but-naked, sea-bathing / city people'; while the latter describes these reddened limbs as 'red india-rubber tubing, inflated' and refers to this sun-burnt state as 'nullity', the antithesis of 'health' (Lawrence, MS1, p.18; 1993a, p.625). Similarly in the poem 'What are the Wild Waves Saying?' the question raised in the title is given the following answer:

It seems to me they are saying:  
How disgusting, how infinitely sordid this humanity is  
that dabbles its body in me  
and daubs the sand with its flesh  
in myriads, under the hot and hostile sun!  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.21; 1993a, p.628)

In 'Oh Wonderful Machine!' the robotic people for whom the machine has become a symbol or emblem, are people 'to whom the sun is merely something that makes the thermometer rise!' (Lawrence, MS1, p.32; 1993a, p.643):



people, in other words, to whom the sun has become merely a thought-form. In 'Stoic', the opening lament is occasioned by the death of the sun through loss of contact:

Groan then, groan.  
For the sun is dead, and all that is in heaven  
is the pyre of blazing gas.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.13; 1993a, p.702)

These are the lines that bear closest resemblance to Lawrence's prose of his later writing in the 'Introduction' to *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*, when he writes 'our experience of the sun is dead', and refers to the sun (in its debased thought-form state) as a 'ball of blazing gas'.

It is not only the sun that modern man, according to Lawrence, has lost or killed. He refers to the masses as 'You who have no feeling of the moon as she changes her quarters!' (Lawrence, MS1, p.32; 1993a, p.643), describing the consequences of this lack of feeling in 'Stoic':

And the moon that went  
so queenly, shaking her glistening beams  
is dead too, a dead orb wheeled once a month round the park.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.13; 1993a, p.702)

In *Last Poems* we do not see the hostile, vitriolic aspect of the moon described later in *Apocalypse*; although its freedom and beauty is employed as a contrast with the trapped condition of humankind. In the poem 'Listen to the Band!' the living, animate, free moon is contrasted with the constricted 'music' of dead humanity:

A little moon, quite still, leans and sings to herself  
throughout the night  
and the music of men is like a mouse gnawing,  
gnawing in a wooden trap, trapped in.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.40; 1993a, p.656)

Modern man is 'trapped in'; yet in *Last Poems* as in *Apocalypse* Lawrence finds a way in which the possibility of re-establishing contact, of making a connection, may be imaginatively conveyed. In the poem 'If You Are a Man' the future is envisaged in terms of a new kind of knowledge, perhaps definable in terms of sense-knowledge or sense-consciousness. We must aim

To know the moon as we have never known  
yet she is knowable.  
To know a man as we have never known  
a man, as never yet a man was knowable, yet still shall be.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.47; 1993a, p.666)

The moon is 'knowable': but this kind of knowledge does not entail the analytical, scientific probing that results in the 'pock-marked moon' of which Lawrence is so scornful in *Apocalypse*. The knowledge Lawrence advocates involves the establishment of a meaningful contact, rather than an objective, mental response.

The strange, white, magical quality of the moon is similarly expressed in the following lines, from the poem 'Return of Returns':

When the moon, from out of the darkness  
has come like a thread, like a door just opening  
opening, till the round white doorway of delight  
is half open.  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.13; 1993a, p.702)

Here the description of the wafer-thin crescent moon as 'thread' and as an opening door is both visually precise and symbolic. The moon does not only have the appearance of a thin crack created when a door is nudged slightly ajar; it also provides the first hint or suggestion of a doorway opening to new worlds and different kinds of knowledge and perception.

The sense of the moon's 'enormous potency' when perceived as 'living' in the Chaldean sense is conveyed in other *Last Poems*. In the poem 'Delight of Being Alone' Lawrence writes:



I know no greater delight than the sheer delight of being alone.  
It makes me realise the delicious pleasure of the moon  
that she has in travelling by herself...

(Lawrence, MS1, p.10; 1993a, p.610)

Later in *Apocalypse* Lawrence describes the moon as 'so rounded, so velvety, moving so serene'. The 'poised' moon is in the poem a symbol for aloneness, solitude and self-sufficiency; it is integral and cannot be shattered, as is evident in Birkin's futile attempt to stone and break up the moon in *Woman in Love*. In *Last Poems* the moon's coldness or coolness suggests this ability to remain aloof and integral, rather than suggesting the potentially contemptuous and abrasive aspect later described in Lawrence's 'Introduction to *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*'.

In 'Invocation to the Moon' the moon, personified as a 'great glorious lady' and a 'glistening garmentless beauty' is seen not only as a white doorway of delight but as a 'heavenly mansion', a necessary progression beyond the glowing house of the sun:

Far and forgotten is the Villa of Venus the glowing  
and behind me now in the gulfs of space lies the golden house of the sun,  
and six have given me gifts, and kissed me god-speed  
kisses of four great lords, beautiful, as they held me to their bosom  
in farewell,  
and kiss of the far-off lingering lady who looks over the distant fence  
of the twilight,  
and one warm kind kiss of the lion with golden paws –  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.7; 1993a, p.695)

The moon is the 'garmentless lady of the last great gift', capable of bestowing upon the narrator his 'lost limbs' and 'lost white fearless breast', then setting him again 'on moon-remembering feet / a healed, whole man'. The moon is also the 'last [astronomical] house' to be inhabited prior to death, for it is sympathetic to the 'personality' rather than the 'ego', and its coolness is more desirable than the intense heat of the sun. The moon is also an image of change

through cyclicity, and it thus an appropriate image for death and rebirth conceived either in terms of reincarnation or the constantly regenerative processes of nature.

The poem 'Prayer', the last poem in the 'More Pansies' notebook - which is also an 'invocation' to the moon - makes an explicit distinction between the sympathetic moon and hostile sun:

Give me the moon at my feet  
Put my feet upon the crescent, like a Lord!<sup>3</sup>  
O let my ankles be bathed in moonlight, that I may go  
sure and moon-shod, cool and bright-footed  
towards my goal.

For the sun is hostile, now  
his face is like the red lion.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.69; 1993a, p.684)

In this poem the moon is the heavenly body that provides literal support in the 'autumn' of life, while the sun in its ferocious or leonine aspect is inappropriate in its brightness and vigour. Lawrence here adheres to the distinction made by Empedocles between the 'sharp-darting sun and the gentle moon' (Burnet, 1892, p.225). There is a time when it is appropriate for the sun to yield its place to the moon, as is described in 'The Argonauts':

Now that the sun, like a lion, licks his paws  
and goes slowly down the hill:  
now that the moon, who remembers, and only cares  
that we should be lovely in the flesh, with bright, crescent feet,  
pauses near the crest of the hill, climbing slowly, like a queen  
looking down on the lion as he retreats -

(Lawrence, MS2, p.1; 1993a, p.687)

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<sup>3</sup> The image of the lord standing on the crescent moon may derive directly from Revelation. Pryse refers to this figure as the 'lunar goddess' or 'Diana, the "many-breasted mother," who appears in the *Apocalypse* as the "Woman clothed with the Sun, the moon underneath her feet"' (Pryse, 1910, p.37). As in the case of the sun symbol, the moon adopts various aspects in Pryse's book. For instance, Pryse refers to 'The Light of the Logos, Arche, the DIVINE SUBSTANCE, primordial matter', saying that they are 'symbolized by the Sky-Virgin, the Moon' (Pryse, 1910, p.66).



It is the ascendancy of the moon in this poem that enables the Argonauts, figures of ancient myth and another kind of consciousness, to return: it is the moon that can provoke change of this magnitude, and provide the link with the older, more 'connected' civilisation. The poem 'Middle of the World' describes the supremacy of the moon in her 'exaltation', risen above the hostile sun to a position of dominance:

And now that the moon who gives men glistening bodies  
is in her exaltation, and can look down on the sun...  
(Lawrence, MS2, p.2; 1993a, p.688)

The moon's exaltation is thus used by Lawrence to correspond with the autumn of life ('Now it is autumn and the falling fruit'), and simultaneously with the rebirth into a contact with mythology and the Minoan distance.

The poem 'The Hostile Sun' elaborates on the distinction between sun and moon, associating the sun with 'daytime consciousness', fixity and hardness or dogmatism:

Sometimes the sun turns hostile to men  
when the daytime consciousness has got overweening  
when thoughts are stiff, like old leaves  
and ideas are hard, like acorns ready to fall.

Then the sun turns hostile to us  
and bites at our throats and chests  
as he bites at the stems of leaves in autumn, to make them fall.  
(Lawrence, MS1, pp.8-9; 1993a, pp.608-9)

Suffering is inflicted and destruction occurs 'though the sun bronzes us', for the solar power is 'hostile to all the old leafy foliage of our thoughts / and the old upward flowing of our sap, the pressure of our upward flow of feeling / is against him'. While the sun is revealed as inimical to the parts of our consciousness associated with our primitive anthropological roots, the moon is described as 'cool and unconcerned', 'calm with the calm of scimitars and

brilliant reaping hooks / sweeping the curve of space and mowing the silence' (Lawrence, MS1, p.9; 1993a, p.609). The coolness of the moon here enables us to 'have peace', to achieve a state associable with the oblivion described in many of the death poems: most notably the poems fashioned from the long 'More Pansies' draft 'Ship of Death'.

It seems that in his prose discussion of symbols in *Apocalypse* and his 'Introduction to *Dragon of the Apocalypse*', Lawrence is certainly incorporating and developing ideas and images prevalent in his astrological poems: ideas which themselves may have been provoked by his familiarity with texts like *The Apocalypse Unsealed*, and by his close contact with Carter and Carter's writing at the time of composing *Last Poems*. In the 'Introduction', for example, Lawrence states explicitly his desire to establish contact with the heavenly bodies, a contact that existed in the days of the Chaldeans, but which has been lost by modern man:

I would like to know the stars again as the Chaldeans knew them, two thousand years before Christ. I would like to be able to put my ego into the sun, and my personality into the moon, and my character into the planets, and live the life of the heavens, as the early Chaldeans did...I long for the sun again, and the moon and stars, for the Chaldean sun and the Chaldean stars...Because *our* sun and *our* moon are only thought-forms to us, balls of gas, dead globes of extinct volcanoes, things we *know* but never feel by experience.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.51)

In articulating this aspiration (one not yet achieved: 'I would like to know'), Lawrence emphasises 'experience' as opposed to thought, and physical, sensory perception as opposed to mental or intellectual response. Lawrence sets up a further dichotomy between 'experience' of this nature and the creation of 'thought-forms' which are abstractions from real contact. He elaborates on this notion of the 'thought-form', which he relates to the impoverished condition of the 'poor things' crawling between the heaven and earth of our modern world:



By *experience*, we should feel the sun as the savages feel him, we should 'know' him as the Chaldeans knew him, in a terrific embrace. But our experience of the sun is dead, we are cut off. All we have now is the thought-form of the sun. He is a blazing ball of gas, he has spots occasionally, from some sort of indigestion, and he makes you brown and healthy if you let him...

And that is all we have, poor things, of the sun...Where, for us, is the great and royal sun of the Chaldeans? Where even, for us, is the sun of the Old Testament, coming forth like a strong man to run a race? We have lost the sun. We have lost the sun, and we have found a few miserable thought-forms. (Lawrence, 1980, pp.51-52)

The moon, like the sun, is dead, because it has become merely a thought-form. This is a result in part of the 'scientific' methods of perceiving and responding to the heavenly bodies: 'think of the pock-marked horror of the scientific photographs of the moon!' (Lawrence, 1980, p.52).

Yet Lawrence goes on to say that 'the moon is not therefore a dead nothing'; that although the scientific image is 'a great blow' 'the imagination can recover from it' (Lawrence, 1980, p.52). For it is not in fact that the moon itself has become merely a 'dead lump'; rather modern man is projecting on to the moon a reflected image of his own nullity:

She is not dead. But maybe we are dead, half-dead little modern worms stuffing our damp carcasses with thought-forms that have no sensual reality. When we describe the moon as dead, we are describing the deadness in ourselves. (Lawrence, 1980, p.53)

The deadness of humanity's response can provoke a violent response from the moon: which, like the sun, is shown in the 'Introduction to *The Dragon of Apocalypse*' to adopt at times a hostile aspect:

But the moon is Artemis still, and a dangerous goddess she is, as she always was. She throws her cold contempt on you as she passes over the sky, poor, mean little worm of a man who thinks she is nothing but a dead lump. She throws back the cold white vitriol of her angry contempt on to your mean, tense nerves, nervous man, and she is corroding you away. (Lawrence, 1980, p.53)

This passage, like so many in *Apocalypse*, derives its vehemence from the 'mystic hatred' that Lawrence has conceived for his contemporary world, which has lost its 'rooted connection' and adopted the machine as its god. Yet Lawrence's critique of modern man in *Apocalypse* is not an embittered refutation: it is rather an attempt to shock his fellow-men into an awareness of their own deadness, and to provoke a response. It is a book that offers alternative modes of living and feeling, rather than dealing in abstractions. By invoking the hostility of the sun and moon in the context of modern man's deadness, Lawrence is trying to reveal the extent of the dislocation that has occurred between man and the cosmos; as well as its catastrophic implications.

*A modern cataclysm.*

It is the clash of 'impulses' between the 'living men' and the 'greedy classes and masses' that has enabled Lawrence to imagine and portray in his *Last Poems* a modern-day cataclysm or apocalypse. Modern man has adopted the machine as his god, so it is the machine that has the power to turn in anger on him when it is repudiated:

And then, when the soul of living men repudiates them  
then at once the impulse of the greedy classes and masses breaks down  
and a chaos of impulses supervenes  
in which is heard the crashing splinter of machines  
and the dull breaking of bones.

(Lawrence, MS1, p.30; 1993a, p.640)

Similarly in the 'More Pansies' poem 'Triumph of the Machine' a cataclysm is occasioned by the 'inward revolt of the native creatures of the soul' (symbolising natural impulses) when faced with the horrifically destructive, relentless power of mechanised man and his machines:



So mechanical man in triumph seated upon the scat of his machine  
will be driven mad from within himself, and sightless, and on that day  
the machines will turn to run into one another  
traffic will tangle up in a long-drawn-out crash of collision  
and engines will rush at the solid houses, the edifice of our life  
will rock in the shock of the mad machine, and the house will come down.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.18; 1993a, p.624)

This apocalypse, resulting from a necessary revolt ironically pushes the indiscriminately destructive nature of the machine to its logical conclusion: that is, self-destruction. Modern man is driven mad 'from within himself' and suffers the consequences of allowing the machine to rule him.

Both poems - 'Impulses' and 'Triumph of the Machine' - seem to suggest a cataclysm that is a consequence of man's actions, as it follows a revolt against the god of the machine. In the poem 'Vengeance is Mine', however, the vengeance described is specifically 'vengeance of the Lord', so that the cataclysm is more genuinely identifiable as apocalyptic. This is evident from the poem's opening: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay'. The victims of this vengeance are those who are 'stiff-necked', 'self-willed', 'self-important' 'self-righteous' and 'self-absorbed':

all of them who wind their energy round the idea of themselves  
and so strangle off their connection with the ceaseless tree of life,  
and fall into sharp, self-centred self-assertion, sharp or soft...  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.12; 1993a, p.616)

These fall victim to the 'unforgiving god' and experience an awful kind of conflagration, similar to the torture predicted for the unsealed souls in Revelation, before they are flung into hell:

...their nerves are stretched till they twangle and snap  
and irritation seethes secretly through their guts, as their tissue disintegrates  
and flames of katabolistic energy alternate  
with ashes of utter boredom, ennui, and disgust.  
(Lawrence, MS1, p.12; 1993a, p.616)

This punishment is described as 'long and unremitting', and lasts until the soul of the 'stiff-necked' is 'ground to dust'.

Yet as in Lawrence's aphoristic 'mill-stone' poems, the disintegrated corpse experiences a kind of recycling, becoming 'fertilising meal' which is subsequently used 'to manure afresh the roots of the tree of life'. So new life is generated at the heart of the cosmos, the roots perhaps also implying the four 'roots' or elements from which, in pre-Socratic terms, all things derive and in which all things have their being. The Lord of this poem is, therefore, different from the Biblical Lord of vengeance, for he is a cosmic rather than simply a Christian God who re-establishes the balance at the heart of the natural cycle by repaying death and self-centred evil with life and universal growth: 'And so the Lord of Vengeance pays back, repays life / for the defection of the self-centred ones' (Lawrence, MS1, p.12; 1993a, p.616).

Ironically, Lawrence in these poems seems to be devising an apocalyptic punishment (sometimes redeemed by subsequently formed new life) for the 'masses' which he would later portray in *Apocalypse* with acute sociological observation as almost slavishly receptive to the powerful import of Revelation. He refers to 'the vast anti-will of the masses, the will to negate power' (Lawrence, 1980, p.69) which he believed provided the motivation for the writing of Revelation, and which occasioned (and still occasions) a widespread enthusiasm particularly among the poor, weak and uneducated:

It is very nice, if you are poor and humble—and the poor may be obsequious, but they are almost *never* truly humble, in the Christian sense—to bring your grand enemies down to utter destruction and discomfiture, while you yourself rise up to grandeur. And nowhere does this happen so splendiferously as in Revelation.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.63)

Lawrence is referring here not to those who are 'humble' in the sense that he describes in the poem 'Tender Reverence' (Lawrence, MS1, p.16; 1993a, p.622), but to those who have only the false appearance of humility. John of Patmos was, according to Lawrence, 'a shameless power-worshipping pagan



Jew, gnashing his teeth over the postponement of his grand destiny' (Lawrence, 1980, p.84). Lawrence asserts that it is such power-lust that has led to the doctrine of 'reigning hereafter', which is merely 'an expression of frustrated desire to reign here and now' (Lawrence, 1980, p.67). Religion of this kind is centred on 'postponed destiny, death, and reward *afterwards*', 'if you are good', rather than being a religion 'of *life*, here and now' (Lawrence, 1980, p.84). Lawrence's poetry and the end of his *Apocalypse*, describing 'the vast marvel of being alive', celebrate that 'here and now' both joyously and poignantly.

Yet Lawrence identifies a positive aspect even in the power urge that he sees as a product of man's frustrated collective self. He finds in the apocalyptic text a 'revelation of the true and positive Power-spirit' (Lawrence, 1980, p.73), which recognises and responds to an innate necessity within humankind:

The human heart needs, needs, needs splendour, gorgeousness, pride, assumption, glory, and lordship. Perhaps it needs these even more than it needs love: at last, even more than bread.

(Lawrence, 1980, p.71)

In the poem 'Lord's Prayer', Lawrence has already articulated this need, in the lines 'Give me, Oh give me / besides my daily bread / my kingdom, my power, and my glory' (Lawrence, MS2, p.14; 1993a, p.704). So Lawrence's response to the 'power' doctrine of Revelation is poised between different possibilities: he identifies the text as simultaneously repellant and insightful. Significantly, too, he offers a new conception of John of Patmos in the later 'Introduction', asserting that John of Patmos' mystic hatred for his fellow-men was so intense only because 'he knew the living realities of men's being were displaced by it' (Lawrence, 1980, p.41). This is perhaps more apposite in stating Lawrence's position than anything else. His aim - in his late poems and last book - is to explore numerous possibilities of 'return' that might rectify this displacement

In so-doing Lawrence offers conflicting, even contradictory perspectives without attempting to resolve them: antitheses abound in the apocalyptic prose works as they have done in *Last Poems*, notably in Lawrence's sympathetic/contemptuous writing on the plight of his fellow-men,

Lawrence tries to offer a way in which modern man might break beyond a self-centred, machine-dominated condition and 're-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family' (Lawrence, 1980, p.149). The poem 'Vengeance is Mine' shows that the cataclysm may have to be of great magnitude in order to succeed: destruction must precede creation, thus adhering to a crucial universal duality. Recognising that 'the long light of Christianity is guttering to go out, and we have to get at new resources in ourselves' (Lawrence, 1988b, p.208). Lawrence's predominant aim in *Apocalypse*, as it has been in the preceding poems, is didactic and altruistic: he is the artist searching to find new ways of consciousness.

It is impossible to determine an exact chronology of inter-relatedness: to ascertain, for instance, particular stages or waves of poetry-writing that correspond with particular stages in Lawrence's preparation for *Apocalypse*. It is impossible to make direct parallels; yet I hope to have shown how a common preoccupation and a common language and field of reference inform the poetry notebooks and the late prose writings on Revelation. *Apocalypse* (coupled with the 'Introduction to *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*') certainly ranks among the most crucial of all the intra-texts which can be considered in relation to *Last Poems*.



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## Chapter 8 After *Last Poems*: A New Start?

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*Shaping a poet's life: how 'to make an end'.*

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains; but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things...

(Tennyson, 1969, p.563) <sup>1</sup>

I have discussed the way in which Lawrence's *Last Poems* have been 'shaped' by placing them in the context of their draft versions and in the wider context of the literary texts that I have identified as crucially influential. A question that remains is the way in which these poems fit into a wider shaping process: namely the shaping of Lawrence's life and career as a poet. When the title '*Last Poems*' is considered, the question may appear facile or unnecessary, for the poems obviously occupy a position at the tail-end of Lawrence's life. As I have mentioned in chapter 7, they are generally considered to occupy an analogous status to that of Lawrence's last testament: a kind of pre-death summation on the brink of visionary insight, sliding over into death because there is no other possible progression. Vision of this nature entails its own destruction: it rips the parasol protecting us from the wider cosmos into shreds (to adopt the terms of Lawrence's essay 'Chaos in Poetry'), and leaves us shivering in the midst of chaos.

This is one way to approach the 'lastness' of these poems, making the assumption that there is an inevitability about them. There is a kind of fatalism latent in such assumptions, particularly when the 'end' in question is that of a

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<sup>1</sup> From 'Ulysses', written on 20 October 1833 and published in 1842.

poet. This view in fact seems torn between two somewhat contradictory conceptions of poetic immortality: the one fatalistic, in which the poet's ends are shaped; the other voluntary or self-determined, in which the poet has the power to 'make an end' and regulate his/her own destiny. Both interpretations harbour sentimentality; they certainly attribute a privileged status to the artist whose life ought, for some reason, to be seen to possess a coherence or harmony that common lives notoriously lack. The conception of poetic lastness that I have evoked is bound up with a preconception regarding artistic transcendentalism. This preconception provokes a further preconception regarding the nature of the poems that are produced: it is impossible to read a collection entitled *Last Poems* without attributing to it a particular significance, even if that significance is solely biographical and imposes on the poems a retrospective awareness of the poet's impending death.

The most interesting and directly relevant discussion of the way in which poetic lives and careers are shaped is to be found in the book *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers*, by Lawrence Lipking. Lipking proceeds from the assumption that a poet's claim will have been to forge an identity, to have 'shaped his life into art' (Lipking, 1981, p.x): a claim which is either borne out or disproved not by the claim itself but by the poems *themselves*. Unlike Yeats, who identified a dichotomy in which an artist can either achieve perfection of his life or his art (an arrogant claim in itself on behalf of the privileged author), Lipking argues that life is shaped through becoming art, and that the life of a poet is therefore best investigated through reference to his poems. Lipking's book derives its originality through discussing a poet by focusing on 'the shape of his life *as a poet*' (Lipking, 1981, p.viii), and it is useful in providing some critical ideas and contexts with which to investigate the nature and status of the *Last Poems*, and more generally the shaping of Lawrence's life through art.

Lipking's book derives its clarity and coherence (as well as its ultimate limitation) though identifying specific, definable stages of a poet's



development. Lipking acknowledges the existence of numerous stages, constantly shifting direction, but identifies three 'testing moments' that are of crucial importance:

Three points, in particular, will focus the investigation: the moment of initiation or breakthrough; the moment of summing up; and the moment of passage, when the legacy or soul of the poet's work is transmitted to the next generation. (Lipking, 1981, p.ix)

It is of course the moment of 'summing up' or 'Harmonium'<sup>2</sup> that is interesting in relation to *Last Poems*. Lipking applies this term in particular to the case of ageing poets, who possess (in Eliot's words) 'the gifts reserved for age / To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort' (Eliot, 1963, p.218).<sup>3</sup> Ageing (and by implication dying) poets feel, according to Lipking, the need to 'put their affairs in order' in the creation of a final book. He goes on to say that 'Last works, like last words, have a special aura of authenticity'; and quotes John of Gaunt's lines as evidence to support this insight:

O, but they say the tongues of dying men  
Inforce attention, like deep harmony.  
Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain,  
For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.  
(Shakespeare, 1988, pp.374-75)

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<sup>2</sup> 'Harmonium' literally means 'a keyboard wind instrument, or reed organ'. Lipking comments: 'Like Peter Quince's clavier or the blue guitar, a harmonium furnishes the poet with a rare distinctive instrument on which to play his tunes. Poets are performers. They make their verses, more or less whimsically, from a patchwork medium that consists of words, themselves, the imagination, or whatever reality the wind can catch. Thus Stevens thinks of his book as a recital: a collection of improvised pieces. But "harmonium" also suggests deeper strains, the harmony in which a poet hopes the pieces of his book will join. ...Though blind and clumsy, not ready as yet to make the parts of his world into a single book, he struggles toward a more cohesive whole-his own *Harmonium*' (Lipking, 1981, p.71).

<sup>3</sup> Lipking's use of this quotation does not take account of the fact that Eliot is here writing with withering irony, as is evident in the words that follow in 'Little Gidding'. The 'gifts' referred to are 'the cold friction of expiring sense'; 'the conscious impotence of rage / At human folly' and 'the rending pain of re-enactment / Of all that you have done, and been' (Eliot, 1963, p.218).

According to Lipking the last literary efforts of a dying poet will, through sheer urgency, be free of 'ornament and deception', as their author is faced with 'a vast silence into which every word reverberates' (Lipking, 1981, p.68). The mythologised visionary/dying poet is in this account prompted to transcendental utterance by necessity: necessity imposed upon him by the passage of time, and by the sense of duty urging him to produce a totalising final vision.

Lipking identifies the epic as the most appropriate and common genre adopted by poets in the past to express their visionary last words. In modern times, he argues, the *Collected Poems* edition has taken the place of the epic, as it is such an edition that enables the poet to engender his 'longest poem' which is 'the ensemble of all his poems together'. Lipking cites Yeats and Cavafy as examples of modern poets who 'seem to regard the ultimate fruit of all their work as a poetic autobiography in the shape of a single book...To make such a book is to redeem individual poems from their solitude and the poet's life from time' (Lipking, 1981, p.70). This totalising approach is, arguably, an extension of the approach adopted by Lawrence in relation to the collections *Look! We Have Come Through!* and *Pansies*. He refers to the former as the biography of an emotional or inner life; and asks the reader of the latter volume to contextualise the poems, filling in the biographical and circumstantial background so the poetry can be better understood. Both these approaches prioritise the book as an entity rather than the individual, by implication fragmentary, poems that form merely a part of the whole. Lawrence did in fact create his own *Collected Poems* edition in 1928, two years before he died: thus conforming, or seeming to conform, to an aspect of Lipking's theory. Yet Lawrence cannot be neatly fitted into the category of a pre-death visionary neatly summarising his own poetic career, in Lipking's sense of it, as I hope to show. Lawrence's case is complicated, of course, by the fact that he was not only a poet, he was not even primarily a poet. However the fact that he eludes



categorisation will reveal the limitations of Lipking's theory rather than prove Lawrence to be anomalous among literary figures.

Lawrence collected his poems for publication in 1928, having refused to respond to a suggestion that he might do so nine years earlier.<sup>4</sup> The dying-poet myth would emphasise the fact that in 1920 he was still mid-career: that the time was not propitious for the creation of a volume that would constitute a summing-up of his life and poetic career. By 1925, however, he was obviously beginning to think about shaping his life; it was then that he started to produce autobiographical essays.<sup>5</sup> By 1928 Lawrence's health was failing and he knew that he was dying; so it may be considered in retrospect to have been a good time to have chosen to collect the volumes of poetry that were to sum up his poetic oeuvre. Another interpretation is, however, possible: one that is less idealising, relying as it does on pragmatism rather than romance. By 1928 Lawrence was not, by his standards, particularly productive as a writer, and had published only one book in the previous year (1927). The offer to publish a weighty volume of poetry which would involve an effort of revision and selection rather than of original composition must have been an attractive prospect. By this time, too, Lawrence would probably have considered that he had sufficient material to include in such a volume, particularly after the composition and publication of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923). In 1920 a *Collected Poems* edition would have been much less accomplished as well as less substantial, as the later *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* poems are among

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<sup>4</sup> The idea that Lawrence should collect his poems came from Martin Secker in 1919: see Lawrence's letter of 6 August (Lawrence, 1984, p.379).

The subsequent suggestion also came from Secker on 30 September 1927 (Lawrence, 1991, pp.167-68). The idea of dividing the volume into a 'Rhyming' and an 'Unrhyming' volume came in November 1927 (Lawrence, 1991, p.206), at which time Secker also stated that he was sending Lawrence volumes of his published poetry. By 14 November 1927 Lawrence was at work (Lawrence, 1991, p.213) and by 18 November had organised one volume (Lawrence, 1991, p.223). On 11 January 1928 he had organised both volumes and was typing: at this stage he was using the new titles 'Lyrical Verse' and 'Free-Verse'. On 16 January 1928 he was still working on the typing of the first volume: although *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had been written in the interim.

<sup>5</sup> See Worthen, 1991, pp.500-503.

Lawrence's most successful free-verse writings. A poems edition published in 1928 would also come at a time when Lawrence was plagued by the censorship issue: unlike *Lady Chatterley's Lover* it would be a relatively 'safe' edition that would avoid allegations of obscenity and notoriety. It seems then that Lawrence was driven by practical and commercial reasons to create his *Collected Poems* edition when he did, rather than by a sense of vocation and poetic destiny.

Another crucial way in which Lawrence's *Collected Poems* edition belies the sort of categorising imposed on poetic careers by Lipking is the fact that if *Collected Poems* is seen as a Harmonium, it is decidedly premature. While finishing the edition Lawrence pondered over the question of what to do afterwards:

I'll sort of feel I've got everything behind me, when these are done, - and the novel [*Lady Chatterley's Lover*]. Then what next? Some sort of a new start? (Lawrence, 1991, p.271)

He then proceeded to write almost half as much poetry again during the last two years of his life. Such a 'new start' may be illuminated by Lipking's conception of the relation between old poetic material and new; his version, in other words, of poetic sequencing. According to him:

A poet who wishes to grow must learn to read his own early work, to explore its secret life and hidden meanings. Even apprentice work often contains some gist of everything to come—if the right eye sees it. The only singing-school, as Yeats would have it, studies monuments of its own magnificence; poetry itself is the source of poetry, poems beget poems. (Lipking, 1981, p.15)

When creating *Collected Poems* Lawrence was re-reading, revising and re-categorising his earlier poems, notably assigning poems to the 'Rhyming' and 'Unrhyming' categories, according to the volumes in which they appeared. If the re-reading of poems inevitably provokes new insights - if poems beget poems - then the collecting of earlier writing into a composite volume seems



likely to have provoked the kind of surge of poetic activity that Lawrence experienced after publishing *Collected Poems*. Lipking asserts that this process - a kind of return - results in the neat cyclicity of a poet's life in which 'each makes a whole and satisfying poetic world by redeeming the first sources of his inspiration. "In my beginning is my end"' (Lipking, 1981, p.15). This theory could be applied to Lawrence's poetry, and to his late texts in general. It could be argued that his contact with the youthful verse collected in *Collected Poems* provoked the new 'pansy' poetry that derived from insights inherent in the early verse, despite its apparent newness. It could be argued also that the doggerel style that characterises the *Pansies* collection of 1928-9 is a reaction against the neat artifice of rhyming that Lawrence was faced with when collecting his poetry, but which he nevertheless did not alter when revising the poems for publication in 1928. *Pansies* may be a product of the kind of feeling previously expressed by Lawrence when articulating his views on art in a letter to Carlo Linati of 22 January 1925: 'I can't bear art that you can walk round and admire...An author should be in among the crowd, kicking their shins or cheering them on to some mischief or merriment -' (Lawrence, 1989b, pp.200-1).

Proceeding from this it is arguable that the 'new start' or wave of creativity beginning after *Collected Poems* with *Pansies* culminated, appropriately, in *Last Poems*: the end. The verse of *Last Poems* does, as I have argued, create links with the influences of Lawrence's youth: with the poetry of Keats, Shelley, Swinburne and Whitman, all of which had filtered into Lawrence's consciousness early like the banal Non-conformist hymns of his childhood. The essay 'Hymns in a Man's Life', written in 1929, also creates links with the past, provoked as it is by an event reminiscent of an Eastwood family gathering. 'A Dream of Life' too, written in October 1927, returns to Eastwood for its vision, amalgamating youthful experience with intermediary events and accumulated knowledge to articulate a visionary conception of the future. *Apocalypse* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* revert to youthful

preoccupations: one is quite literally a 'last testament' that begins with recollections of childhood experiences of religion; the other is a revolutionary portrayal of the relation between the sexes, placed again in a Nottinghamshire context. There are strong arguments to support the allegation that Lawrence makes a literary end for himself in Lipking's sense.

Yet there are also strong arguments against this categorising. It is dull to make an end in this sense, and poets have fought against it. In the terms of Tennyson's poem, those who live most intensely are most likely to resent the impending end and struggle to set out towards the arch through which the untravelled world gleams. Lawrence, during his last months, was constantly discussing plans for his return to New Mexico. Significantly, too, the literary works on which he was engaged in 1929-30 were mostly left unfinished: they are thus examples of work in progress, drafts rather than completed literary artefacts.

It is important to emphasise the distinction made in my introductory chapter between works which Lawrence had completed and prepared for publication - works clearly intended for a public - and the books/poems that were abandoned before they reached this stage of development. As I have argued, *Pansies* clearly had the status of an ordered book, a completed volume, as did its offshoot *Nettles*, although the latter was not published until shortly after Lawrence's death. These poems were very obviously intended for the public domain: in fact their *raison d'être* was entailed in their being in the hands of the public, for they must have someone to sting. The case is rather different both with *Apocalypse* and with the poems we now know as 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems'. I shall look briefly at *Apocalypse* (the later work) first.

#### *Late works in progress.*

It is easy to assume that *Apocalypse* is a finished volume, as it gives the impression of an ending: its final affirmation that 'the vast marvel is to be



alive...' (Lawrence, 1980, p.149) seems suitably conclusive - and, according to the dying-poet myth, suitably poignant in its life-affirmation in the light of Lawrence's death shortly afterwards. In fact Lawrence did not actually finish *Apocalypse* but felt he had to lay it aside.<sup>6</sup> The text of this book exists in different versions, some of which are included as lengthy fragments in the Appendices to Mara Kalnins' Cambridge and Penguin editions of *Apocalypse*. There is also a draft fragment entitled 'Apocalypsis II', which Mara Kalnins includes. This fragment, written in a different notebook from the other materials, lasts for only a few pages, ending enigmatically with the assertion 'Before men had cultivated the Mind, they were not fools' (Lawrence, 1980, p.200). Significantly the conception of God in this fragment is radically different from that (or rather those) I have identified in *Apocalypse* and previously in *Last Poems*. Was the fragment a new start, a continuation or second part of the *Apocalypse* book that would take the concepts in new directions? Alternatively it could be a rewriting of parts of the longer book, thrashing out for instance the Pythagorean approach to number symbolism and the significance of numbers in a conception of the cosmos.

*Apocalypse*, though an unfinished book, was clearly intended to inhabit the public sphere: right from its initial conception as an introduction to Frederick Carter's *Dragon* it was intended for publication, and Lawrence undoubtedly had this aim in mind for his own book. Yet it was left incomplete, and its status as work in progress is highlighted by Frederick Carter himself, who emphasised Lawrence's reticence when it came to exposing the contents of the book to his companion and collaborator. Relaying his discussions with Lawrence on the Apocalyptic theme which 'came up again and again whilst we talked', Carter emphasises Lawrence's reluctance to comment on his actual writing:

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<sup>6</sup> See letter to Frederick Carter of 5? February 1930: 'Have not finished my longer essay on Revelation -and am abandoning it' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.640).

But he said little of what he was doing, stopping his writing and putting aside the exercise book in which he did his work without remark, as one arrived. In fact, he usually was secretive about his work in progress, whatever it might be. (Carter, 1932, p.61)

Lawrence's reticence may be attributable to his reluctance to expose material to Carter, for reasons which may be conjectured. Carter no longer held the fascination for Lawrence that he once did: Lawrence thought of him in 1929 as someone who has gone 'dead'. This loss of respect may have meant that Lawrence valued his opinion less, and believed that a discussion of his text with Carter would have been unprofitable. Another perhaps more likely possibility is that Lawrence, having broken free of Carter's original intentions for the joint book in order to write a volume of his own, may have wished to play down the fact in his collaborator's presence. He may not have wished Carter to realise the size and significance of his new endeavour, or to become familiar with the new ideas that in fact signified a break with the person who had impelled him initially into a lasting fascination with Apocalyptic literature. In short, Lawrence may not have considered Carter an appropriate audience at the time of writing.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the distinction between more private 'work in progress' and material collected and prepared for publication is a significant one, and one which reflects interestingly on *Last Poems*. Lawrence, writing copious numbers of poems into the 'More Pansies' and 'Last Poems' notebooks after May 1929, scarcely refers to the fact that he is composing verse in the correspondence of this period. Apart from very occasional exceptions, such as the poem 'Triumph of the Machine' which was selected for appearance in a journal with three other poems, there is virtually no evidence of Lawrence reading these late poems aloud or discussing them even with Frieda. The only evidence of such a design is recorded by Achsah Brewster, who describes Lawrence saying:

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<sup>7</sup> It seems that Lawrence did read some of *Apocalypse* to Frieda later on, as she writes: 'In those days he wrote his *Apocalypse*; he read it to me, and how strong his voice still was, and I said: "But this is splendid"' (Frieda Lawrence, 1935, p.270).



One afternoon we were with him and Frieda at Villa Beau Soleil, he began selecting some of his 'Nettles' for a small volume. There were to be others called 'Dead Nettles,' because they were to have no sting in them. He turned the pages of his notebook, adding that he had been writing some verses about death and would read them; then, shaking his head wistfully, he closed the book, saying: 'I can't read them now.'  
(Brewster and Brewster, 1934, pp.308-9)

The Dead Nettles, poems without a sting, are distinct from the *Nettles* in remaining intimate rather than overtly public, not geared towards an audience. The same applies to the 'verses about death', and Lawrence's inability to read them invites obvious interpretations about his sensitivity and vulnerability in the face of his own impending dissolution. It is possible that the Brewsters' retrospective account is coloured by this inevitable contextualising: the adjective 'wistfully' seems most appropriate in the circumstances, yet we must recall that it has been subjectively applied. Lawrence's reluctance to read the poems may in part have reflected the same feeling about his subject-matter and audience as his refusal to engage with Carter over *Apocalypse*. Perhaps his reticence is provoked by a sense that the poems are as yet incomplete - they are merely work in progress - and not yet ready to assume a public identity. Alternatively it is possible that he never wanted or expected them to enter the public domain.

The last two MS notebooks are undeniably incomplete: in my first chapter I have already considered the various possibilities regarding a future redrafting of the poems in a verse-book made by Lawrence had he lived. In this sense the poem-versions are drafts rather than fair copies, work in progress rather than a finished volume. These poems, as I have argued, engage with and extend the 'pansy' style of the previous book; and the fact that Lawrence referred to some of them as 'Dead Nettles' reveals that he was placing the poetry of the 'More Pansies' notebook within the same general contexts/categories.

It is wrong, I feel, to think of *Last Poems* as an end, a conclusion, a summing up of the process begun after *Collected Poems* in *Pansies*. The notebooks are a continuation: an attempt to conclude would be highly incongruous when considering Lawrence's life-affirmation at the end of *Apocalypse*, and his discussion of the changing phases of a man's life in his letters and poems. In letters to Earl Brewster, Aldous Huxley and Enid Hilton in early September 1929 he refers to the 'masculine change of life', and discusses the way in which 'the animal man is in a state of change' between 42 and 49, demanding 'different food and different rhythms', and needing 'a new diet and a new man': a new lease of life.<sup>8</sup> The poem 'Shadows' is as much about the changes within life as the change between life and death. Lawrence is a poet of phases or waves of life and creativity, always imagining and predicting 'new blossoms of me' that will be engendered when he is sent forth 'on a new morning, a new man'. Lawrence does not seem to be a poet of endings: he remained a defiant lover of life, and in the late poems usually envisaged the after-life as a kind of return.

Lipking, basing his argument on the necessity for poets to make an end, sometimes justifies his approach with refreshing counter-arguments. Considering Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which he refers to as a 'last testament', poems which 'leave nothing unfinished' (Lipking, 1981, p.74), he stands back momentarily to bring into play the following perspective:

But why should they need to end? The business of a poet, after all, is to make poems, not to shape a career. Would not his best last words be something unfinished—the new poem he was writing, like a soldier in the field, when death interrupted him?

(Lipking, 1981, p.74)

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence's ideas regarding the masculine change of life were inspired by a doctor who visited him in Rottach in early September: 'One [of two doctors] is a new, very modern one, who was a *Pfarrer* - a priest - and has a *Klinik* in Munchen and does wonders, chiefly with diet and breathing' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.466).



The duty of a poet is the kind of 'shaping' my other chapters have described, the shaping of poems rather than a life. This insight leads Lipking to offer another perspective on the concept of 'harmonium'. In spite of the fact that he insists that 'the image of a fulfilled poetic destiny—the life of the poet—continues to lure both poet and reader' (Lipking, 1981, p.11), he also confesses that it is necessary to ask the question 'Does such a harmony exist as anything but a fiction?' (Lipking, 1981, p.72).

Lipking's mention of the reader's participation in creating the fiction of poetic careers is significant. Ends are made perhaps not by the poets themselves but retrospectively by readers and critics who impose a fictional order - a wholeness or harmony - on the poet who (once dead) can be thoroughly placed in the context of his biography. This is emphasised in the case of Keats, who (according to Lipking) 'did not finish his career', and left the alleged great epic that was to 'advance the march of intellect' unwritten. Lipking summarises the way in which attempts have been made to impose upon Keats' life an appropriate order and alternative 'shape':

Each succeeding generation, each new biography, has labored to shape his life and his career as a poet into a satisfying whole. It seems almost a moral obligation. If Keats himself was robbed of the chance to end what he had begun, all the more reason for the rest of us to give him back his destiny and repair his loss of time. The perfect Keats lives in us. (Lipking, 1981, p.180)

It seems that such a retrospective shaping by readers or biographers is (to adopt Ursula's phrase) 'an obstinacy, a perversity': a conscious attempt to impose an order by becoming the divinity that shapes the poet's ends. Keats, squeezed into such a mould, would be more profoundly robbed: stripped of the chance to preserve a ragged destiny in which he is recognised to have been cut off mid-career, with many great poems still unwritten. An acceptance of this potentiality seems ultimately more respectful. The case of Wordsworth provides an interesting example of the way in which a poet, then subsequently

his readership, shapes very specifically a poetic career.<sup>9</sup> The poet may shape his ends to an extent while alive: yet once he is dead he is shaped and contextualised by his unrelenting successors.

Lipking (emphasising as he does the way in which the poet, rather than the reader carves out his poetic career) recognises that the sort of planning inherent in the shaping of a life or career 'can inhibit the fresh starts in unexpected directions, the ever-quickenening sense of discovery, that many writers live for' (Lipking, 1981, p.79). This is particularly relevant in Lawrence's case, whose life as a poet involved a succession of new beginnings, particularly when moving into the 1928 'pansy'-writing phase. Lipking interestingly asks the question 'Can the work of a great poet consist entirely of beginnings?', and chooses to cite the specific example of Walt Whitman, who was so influential in inspiring Lawrence with his sense of poetic flux through the use of liberating free-verse. Whitman said of *Leaves of Grass* (1855) (described by Lipking as 'a poem of beginnings'): 'A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning' (Whitman, 1973, p.729). Lipking, describing the way in which Whitman, like Goethe, 'set out to make a book of his life' comments:

Whitman's inspiration, unquenchable as grass, would show that a starting-out and a summing-up could be one and the same: a harmonium made from initiations...Whitman would generate himself. 'Thus we presume to write, as it were, upon things that exist not, and travel by maps yet unmade, and a blank. But the throes of birth are upon us...' (Lipking, 1981, p.114)

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<sup>9</sup> The 1805 version of Wordsworth's *Prelude* has been referred to as his attempt to 'shape...his memories', or 'shape the understanding of his life' (Gill, 1989, p.6-7). Much later, in August 1838, Wordsworth became 'possessed by revision', indicating his enthusiasm by reading the entire poem to Isabella Fenwick. At the time Wordsworth considered the poem too personal to publish, but wanted to prepare it through revision so it would be consigned to posterity after his death. Posterity has of course chosen (a long time after the poet's death) to resurrect the 1805 version and 'shape' its conception of Wordsworth according to a reading of both texts. The earlier text is considered by many to be of greater interest.



Fanciful though this is, the conception of a series of new starts, new births and new beginnings seems a more profitable way of considering the creation of poems than to force them into a coherent pattern illuminated clearly by retrospect. As well as Whitman, Lipking identifies Goethe - another of Lawrence's youthful 'denizens' (to employ Bloom's term once more) - as a poet in flux who eludes retrospective categorisation:

Goethe constantly found the same secret: the way to unity was *through* metamorphosis. Confronted by a Heraclitean nature where flux and transformation rule the rhythms of life, swept along by a Heraclitean self, the poet submits to the stream, trusting that something imperishable will survive. (Lipking, 1981, p.95)

Adopting the metaphor of the Heraclitean river again seems apposite: a poet, being a poet and not a god, is swept along, submitting to an arbitrary process as there is no alternative. Lawrence would surely have favoured this approach to his 1928-30 poems (with the exception of the term 'imperishable' when applied to art), which he desired to be fleeting and momentary - like pansies or Etruscan towns - rather than ponderous erections on the face of the earth. A series of fresh starts would have seemed more congenial, particularly as the poems posthumously given the title *Last Poems* do not in fact seem to be the last poems Lawrence wrote. Concurrently and subsequently, Lawrence turns out to have been exploring a new style of poetry writing late in 1929 and early in 1930, which we can see in the fragments written as prologues to the Cresset Press (1930) edition of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*; as well as in the short piece posthumously entitled 'Fire'.

*The prologues to BirdsBeasts.*<sup>10</sup>

The prologues to *BirdsBeasts*, written between 1 and 12 November 1929, were probably concurrent with the last poems to have been written into the 'Last Poems' notebook. It may be argued that their interest and significance ought not to be overestimated, as they were written to order, in response to a request made by the wood-engraver Blair Hughes Stanton,<sup>11</sup> who had undertaken the designs for the Cresset Press edition of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1930). The fragments may have their roots in a letter to Hughes-Stanton of 30 August 1929, in which Lawrence expressed his willingness to compose 'a new foreword, on the essential nature of poetry or something like that' (Lawrence, 1993c p.457). A further letter written almost two months after reveals that in the interim Lawrence had been requested to compose not a general foreword, but a series of short prologues to be placed at the beginning of each sub-section of the edition. A letter to Laurence Pollinger reveals Lawrence's initial lack of enthusiasm about the idea, but his willingness to oblige if at all possible - an approach that seems in concordance with his unfailing determination to help Hughes-Stanton (who was at the time very short of money and in need of publicity):

I haven't got a copy of *Birds Beasts and Flowers* here, but will get one, and see if there is any point or amusement in a hundred-word caption before each of the nine parts. If I see any point, and can do it, I'll do it, but at present feel perfectly blank before the idea.

(Lawrence, 1993c, p.535)

Lawrence was evidently waiting for a copy of his book over the next couple of weeks, as in another letter to Pollinger written on 1 November he professes: 'I haven't got a copy of *Birds Beasts*, but when my trunks come, I'll see if I can

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<sup>10</sup> '*BirdsBeasts*' is an abbreviation that Lawrence adopted in his correspondence when referring to his poetry collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, first published in 1923.

<sup>11</sup> See Lawrence, 1987b, p.411 note 3 and Lawrence, 1987b, p.457 note 1.



put in those bits in front of the separate sections - as Hughes-Stanton wants - though I don't in the least know how to begin' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.549). Evidently the 'bits' were written with alacrity once the book did arrive, for by 12 November Lawrence was writing:

Here are the nine bits - I hope they will do - if not don't use them - just put them in the fire - I only did them because you wanted them, so you and the publishers can do as you like.

(Lawrence, 1993c, p.563)

The tone here is flippant and non-committal, suggesting that Lawrence had no interest in 'bits' which had been written only as an offer of friendship.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to consider the fragments unworthy of comment simply because Lawrence chose to adopt a casual tone when sending them to a friend for the publishers to consider. This was a tone he often adopted when facing possible rejection, ridicule or censorship from people who had the power, though not necessarily the expertise, to judge his work. In 1928-9 Lawrence had frequently been driven to cynicism regarding issues of publication and censorship, and may have felt compelled to guard against this by asserting the slightness of his work. The prologues are in fact extremely interesting, and in many ways innovative or at least experimental.

(The prologues are interesting stylistically, as they create new and diverse forms that amalgamate free-verse with prose passages. They also engage with and challenge conventional notions of quotation, by interweaving fragments derived from Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* with Lawrence's own stylistic imitation of the embodied material, without clarifying the distinction between these two categories. This blurring or merging of categories may be seen as merely another superficial gripe against a resented readership.)

About the Cresset Press: the 'bits' to go in front of the *Birds Beasts* sections are part original and sometimes quotations from the

fragments of Xenophanes and Empedokles and others, but I should like it all put in inverted commas, and let them crack their wits (the public) to find out what is ancient quotation and what isn't. (It is nearly all of it me.) (Lawrence, 1993c, p.573)

Yet this statement raises fascinating questions about the nature of textual assimilation and authorial integrity/originality: what does it mean for a text to be 'nearly all of it me'? Lawrence creates a kind of intertextual riddle that can perhaps be resolved in the way that critics like Michael Riffaterre suggest. Yet perhaps Lawrence creates a text that is more than a puzzle - for it locates an original new text in the context of the ancient ones, all the while implying that the new text is not only provoked by but is also inseparable from the text that has been its source or inspiration.

The source text in question is Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy*, which, as I have previously argued, was of such crucial significance during the 1928-30 period. I have already quoted from the letter of 10 October 1929 in which Lawrence wrote to S.S. Koteliansky requesting a copy of the book, which he felt would be relevant to his work on the Apocalyptic material:

Do you still have that book *Early Greek Philosophy* which I bought when I was last in London? [September 1926] if so, would you send it me, I want to do some work on the Apocalypse, and consult it. If you haven't got it, no matter. (Lawrence, 1993c, p.518)

As in 1915, Lawrence acquired a copy of Burnet, intending once more to come out of the camp of the pre-Socratics, thus returning to earlier material and preoccupation in a way that Lipking might perceive as neatly cyclical. The title *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* - derived from a hymn by S. Baring Gould learnt by Lawrence in early childhood <sup>12</sup> - links the poetry of 1923 right back to Lawrence's youth, the period of the Non-conformist hymns discussed in 'Hymns in a Man's Life'. The title may also allude to the phrase 'beasts and birds and the fishes' which appears in Burnet, as fragment 21 of Empedocles:

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<sup>12</sup> See Kalnins, 1992, p.302.



For out of these have sprung all things that were and are and  
shall be - trees and men and women, beasts and birds and the fishes  
that dwell in the waters, yea, and the gods that live long lives and are  
exalted in honour.

For there are these alone; but, running through one another,  
they take different shapes—so much does mixture change them.

(Burnet, 1920, p.209)

It does seem appropriate that Lawrence should return to *BirdsBeasts* in order to 'complete' it late in 1929, as this earlier poetry collection contains within it the seeds for so many later ideas and preoccupations, such as Lawrence's fascination with the Etruscan civilisation as well as with the pre-Socratic philosophers. The poem 'Cypresses' (which I have discussed previously) embodies an anticipation of the approach to the Etruscans that Lawrence would adopt after his later actual visit to the tombs. 'Purple Anemones' may be said to anticipate 'Bavarian Gentians' in its evocation of Dis, Hades and Persephone in the underworld, and its association of this mythology with flowers. Images of mechanism and iron in 'Almond Blossom' - of the 'bad smell' that is left over the middle-earth as it is later over the Minoan distance - pre-empt such poems as 'Triumph of the Machine' and 'We Die Together', in which iron is sunk deep into modern man. The critique of bolshevism offered in 'Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers' is one to which Lawrence would return in 'More Pansies' and *Nettles*, particularly in formulating a political dichotomy in poems such as 'Bourgeois and Bolshevist'. All of the Evangelistic Beasts poems (such as 'St John', quoted below) use imagery strikingly similar to that employed by Carter and then Lawrence in their Apocalyptic writing:

The poor old golden eagle of the word-fledged spirit  
Moulting and moping and waiting, willing at last  
For the fire to burn it up, feathers and all,  
So that a new conception of the beginning and end  
Can rise from the ashes...

Phoenix, Phoenix,

The nest is in flames,  
 Feathers are singeing,  
 Ash flutters flocculent, like down on a blue, wan fledgeling.  
 (Lawrence, 1993a, pp.329-30)

As in the later poem 'Phoenix' (the poem written on the last filled page of the 'Last Poems' notebook), flocculent ash signifies a 'change' or rebirth in which the old is burnt in order for a fresh start, or new adjustment, to ensue.

According to this argument, Lawrence might be seen to be fulfilling his poetic destiny, re-reading his previous work and finding latent in it the seeds that would enable him to return, re-write and complete it. The Cresset Press edition, too, with its elaborate designs and engravings would furnish Lawrence with the opportunity to do what he had promised back in the summer of 1915: to 'write out Herakleitos on tablets of bronze' (Lawrence, 1981, p.364), the bronze tablets being the illuminated text resembling a Blakean plate in its status as a literary artefact.

Yet I have suggested that the very Burnet edition he was using shows that Lawrence was working with new, as well as familiar, material. This is proved irrevocably by the quotations used in the *BirdsBeasts* prologues. As Pinto and Roberts observe in their notes to *Complete Poems*, Lawrence derived his quotations from the third edition of Burnet published in 1920 rather than the first or second which he had used in 1915 when

Russell must have given him the 1st Edition (1892) or the 2nd (1908).  
 The quotations in *BBF*, however, seem to come from the 3rd Edition,  
 as they refer to a passage that does not occur in the two earlier ones.  
 (Lawrence, 1993c, p.995)

The passage to which Pinto and Roberts refer must be the prologue to 'Animals': 'Once, they say, he was passing by when a dog was being beaten, and he spoke this word: "Stop! don't beat it! For it is the soul of a friend I recognised when I heard its voice"' (Lawrence, 1930, p.145). Lawrence's text here is almost identical to the text (fr.4) of the third edition (Burnet, 1920,



p.118), and differs from the text of the second, which reads: 'Once, they say, he was passing by when a dog was being ill-treated. "Stop!" he said, "don't hit it! It is the soul of a friend! I knew it when I heard its voice"' (Burnet, 1908, p.124). I suspect, however, that Pinto and Roberts were actually unaware of the presence of this passage in the second edition, for not only is it slightly different textually, but it appears in a different section from its location in the third.<sup>13</sup>

The question of multiple editions has complicated the task of the puzzle-solving critics attempting to crack the Lawrentian code and separate ancient quotation from Lawrentian paraphrase or pastiche in these prologues. In their notes to *Complete Poems* Pinto and Roberts identify the sources for some of the pre-Socratic quotations but fail to identify others, particularly when the fragment is embedded in a longer prose passage, or when Lawrence adds to or alters parts of the text before weaving it into his own prologue.<sup>14</sup> It seems that Lawrence is working in two ways with Burnet: on the one hand he is quoting the fragments he knows intimately from memory, just as in his 'Nightingale' essay he quotes Keats without needing to consult a written text; on the other he is working more directly with a less familiar text. In the case of the Keats essay, as I mentioned earlier, quoting from memory leads to error in the form of accidental or creative misrepresentation. In 'Reptiles' Lawrence begins his prologue with a favourite Heraclitean insight, which he both misquotes and extends so the ending of the first 'quotation' sounds primarily Lawrentian:

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<sup>13</sup> In their notes the editors refer to page 84 of the third edition, in which a commentary on the above quotation occurs in the 'Pythagoras' section and then is listed directly among the Xenophanes fragments; while in the second edition the quotation appears only in the commentary section on 'Xenophanes' (I will discuss the editorial referencing of this fragment later on).

<sup>14</sup> For their notes to the *BirdsBeasts* prologues in which Pinto and Roberts trace the origins of the allusions (with varying degrees of success) see Pinto and Roberts, 1993, pp. 995-99.

'HOMER was wrong in saying, "Would that strife might pass away from among gods and men!" He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for, if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away—for in the tension of opposites all things have their being—' (Lawrence, 1930, p.105)

Instead of the word 'perish' Lawrence writes 'pass away', and he appends to the fragment the highly Lawrentian phrase 'for in the tension of opposites all things have their being—', indicating (erroneously) that this phrase is an unbroken continuation of the previous words. In fact the appended phrase derives from fragment 45 of Heraclitus:

Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre.  
(Burnet, 1920, p.136)

It is possible that Lawrence decided consciously to add the phrase, as he shows elsewhere that he feels quite at liberty to alter quotations to fit his own purposes, without acknowledging the changes. Yet the substitution for 'perish', as well as the altered punctuation, suggests that he was in fact quoting from his memory of the editions he had encountered earlier in life. By contrast, the quotations from the 3rd edition are either transcribed from the text or derived from a much shorter-term act of memory - for the material is new and not deep-rooted in Lawrence's sub-conscious. These two processes thus appear to have been in progress simultaneously.

When Lawrence adds material or alters a quotation, the textual puzzle becomes more problematic. For instance, Pinto and Roberts fail to identify the line in 'Flowers': ('Oh Persephone, Persephone, bring back to me from Hades the life of a dead man'), saying 'This seems to be a quotation, but we have been unable to trace its origin' (Pinto and Roberts, 1993, p.996). In fact the quotation derives from the end of fragment 111 of Empedocles, which reads: 'Thou shalt bring back from Hades the life of a dead man' (Burnet, 1920, p.221). By adding the Persephone reference, Lawrence has created a link with



the poem 'Purple Anemones', with all the poetic and mythological resonances that it has acquired in the intervening composition of 'Bavarian Gentians'.

Similarly in 'Fruits' Pinto and Roberts assert that 'The last sentence of this preface seems to be a quotation, but we have been unable to trace its origin' (Pinto and Roberts, 1993, p.996). This line reads: 'No sin it is to drink as much as a man can take and get home without a servant's help, so he be not stricken in years'. The origin is to be found in Xenophanes, the words embedded in his first fragment: presumably the reason why the *Complete Poems* editors could not find it. Xenophanes' words are: 'no sin is it to drink as much as a man can take and get home without an attendant, so he be not stricken in years' (Burnet, 1920, p.117). They also fail to give the correct reference for the 'Animals' quotation 'Once they say... heard its voice'. This derives from fragment 7 of Xenophanes, appearing on page 118 of the 3rd edition. Lawrence's text is almost identical: he merely omits the noun Pythagoras which appears within brackets in Burnet, inserts commas strategically and omits the word 'that' twice to reduce superfluous length. Pinto and Roberts say of the quotation 'this is a story told of Pythagoras by Xenophanes quoted by Burnet, op. cit., p. 84', referring not to the fragment itself but to Burnet's paraphrased version located earlier within his commentary on Pythagoras. Burnet's commentary reads: 'Some verses are quoted from Xenophanes, in which we are told that Pythagoras once heard a dog howling and appealed to its master not to beat it, as he recognised the voice of a departed friend' (Burnet, 1920, p.84). Although a note directs the reader to 'Xenophanes, fr. 7.' there is no page reference for this fragment, and as there is no full section on Xenophanes (he appears in a chapter entitled 'Science and Religion') Pinto and Roberts presumably did not look far enough.

The Cresset Press edition adheres to Lawrence's desires regarding the 'nine bits', using quotation marks for the entire text in each case, without attempting to identify and highlight the direct allusions. It would be problematic to attempt such a differentiation between direct allusions and text

which clearly derives from Burnet but which alters or extends it: ought the quotation marks to be applied to the latter as well as the former? The intertextual problem goes beyond or behind source-hunting, raising in miniature the kinds of large-scale issues regarding the nature and assimilation of sources which I have discussed throughout this thesis. It throws into question the status of quotation and allusion: do the 'real' pre-Socratic fragments have greater wisdom and significance than the interpolated texts in which Lawrence conducts a mimetic experiment? Clearly there is a thin stylistic dividing line between the pre-Socratic words and Lawrence's own: hence also the confusion of intent and practice in the use of quotation marks in *Complete Poems*.

In the first (1964) edition of *Complete Poems* the editors express their intention of proceeding a step beyond the Cresset Press edition by separating Burnet-text from Lawrence-text and highlighting this distinction:

The Cresset Press text places every paragraph of the prefaces in inverted commas. Where Lawrence is evidently speaking in his own person, these quotation marks have been deleted in the present text, but they have been retained where it seems to be clear that the passage is a quotation. (Pinto and Roberts, 1964, p.993)

In the 1964 *Complete Poems* edition (and in the second reprint of 1967 which reproduces the 1964 text exactly) the editors adhere to this decision to try to separate the texts. Interestingly they leave quotation marks around text which they believe to be quotation but have not found: such as the passage in 'Fruits' beginning 'No sin is it...' and 'Oh Persephone, Persephone, bring back to me...' in 'Flowers'. By making such assumptions about textual origin they create, of course, an editorial inconsistency: for when Burnet-text has not actually been traced it is impossible to distinguish with any authority the original from the Lawrentian deviation. When Pinto and Roberts find the source of a quotation they take pains to differentiate even very locally between Burnet-text and Lawrence-text through their interpolation of quotation marks: this is evident in the opening section of 'Animals', which reads (in the 1964 text):



AND as 'the dog with its nostrils tracking out the fragments of the beasts' limbs, and the breath from their feet that they leave in the soft grass', runs upon a path that is pathless to men, so does the soul follow the trail of the dead, across great spaces.

(Lawrence, 1964b, p.406)

Here, Lawrence's deviation from Burnet-text is clearly (and accurately) marked. In the light of this general approach, the 'Persephone' quotation in 'Flowers' should read:

Oh Persephone, Persephone, 'bring back to me from Hades the life of a dead man.'

Even then Lawrence's quotation does not entirely match the Burnet-text: the words 'to me' are added. Similarly, if the texts are closely scrutinised, it may be seen that even the 'Ghosts' quotation (above) in Lawrence's version of it is not an exact reproduction of Empedocles' fragment in the Burnet-text: Lawrence writes 'beasts' instead of the singular 'beast's', and makes no concession to the fact that the terms 'The dog' which begin Empedocles' fragment appear in brackets in the Burnet-text. A quotation system that could indicate such changes would, however, be extremely complex, intricate and superfluous.

Between the 2nd (1967) and 3rd (1972) editions of *Complete Poems*, Pinto and Roberts decided to reject their quotation policy in these fragments and revert to the Cresset Press presentation of the text. They do so without making any real acknowledgement of the fact; they say merely in the preface that: 'For this edition a number of errors have been corrected after comparison of the text with the most authoritative sources' (Pinto and Roberts, 1972, p.26). The 3rd edition of *Complete Poems* gave rise to the widely reproduced text of the Viking/Penguin paperback edition, and in consequence this paperback still prints Pinto and Roberts' explanation for the reasons why their

quotation marks differ from those employed in the Cresset text, when in fact they no longer differ.<sup>15</sup>

It seems likely that the decision to revert to the Cresset text was provoked by the editors' attention to the letter in which Lawrence requests quotation marks for his entire text. This letter, written long after the final dispatch to Hughes-Stanton of the MS, must be seen as Lawrence's final statement of intention regarding the texts in question. The Cresset Press text thus becomes a more authoritative text even than the manuscript: and no doubt Pinto and Roberts came to this conclusion between 1967 and 1972. Their decision also suggests that the editors were unable to make the desired distinction between allusion and new material: it is nowhere absolutely evident that Lawrence is 'speaking in his own person' rather than from the perspective, or through the words of, 'some character in whose soul I now live' (Keats, 1970, p.158).

Paradoxically, through textual assimilation, Lawrence seems to have forced critics and readers into a position in which they must accept that a text simultaneously derives from precursive writing and (through weaving and assimilation) belongs to the author who processes and adopts it: we must take Lawrence at face value when he says 'It is nearly all of it me'.

### *The BirdsBeasts prologues: free-verse or another kind of prose?* ✓

The *BirdsBeasts* prologues appeared in print first in the Cresset Press edition of 1930; they were then reproduced in *Phoenix* (pp. 65-68) and in *Complete Poems* by Pinto and Roberts. Although the publishers of these editions

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<sup>15</sup> The only discrepancy is a residual textual error in 'Flowers' which occurred as a result of the editorial intervention which led Pinto and Roberts to add quotation marks earlier on. A superfluous quotation mark appears after 'beans!', in order to distinguish the actual quotation from Lawrence's additional 'saith Empedokles'. The editors did not notice that this particular set of quotation marks is in fact closed later anyway, after the word 'beans-cod.' In the 1972 Heinemann text (reproduced by Penguin), then, we are made aware of the editorial imposition that has altered (then reinstated - *almost* entirely) the Cresset text.



ostensibly published Lawrence's original texts, the discrepancies between them highlight the problems raised with regard not only to the status of quotations and allusion, but to the wider question of form. Both the *Phoenix* and *Complete Poems* texts engage in a kind of regularisation of the original, resulting in the loss of certain distinctive features that are characteristic of Lawrence's use of form in the prologues. It is necessary, first, to describe the Cresset Press edition of the texts, before proceeding to explore the ways in which the later versions differ.

The prologues are printed in the edition on pages facing the designs by Hughes-Stanton that precede each sub-section of the book. The nine titles are: 'Fruits', 'Trees', 'Flowers', 'The Evangelistic Beasts', 'Creatures', 'Reptiles', 'Birds', 'Animals' and 'Ghosts'. Each prologue is printed in italics, with the opening word appearing in capitals. The fragments convey a sense of immediacy and spontaneity in spite of their archaic diction. They do not stand on ceremony but launch into their particular subject, rather in the manner of the poems in which Lawrence begins with a direct address or exhortation: 'Oh, do not tell me the heavens as well are a wheel' ('The Wandering Cosmos') and 'So guns and strong explosives / are evil, evil' ('Murderous Weapons'). The *BirdsBeasts* prologues begin with such lines as 'FOR fruits are all of them female...'; 'OH put them back...', 'BUT fishes are very fiery...', 'YES, and if oxen or lions had hands...' and 'AND as the dog...'. These prologues are unashamedly fragmentary: they seem to delight in adhering to the challenging obscurity of the Heraclitean mode, without engaging in unnecessary preamble. Like the *Pansies* they are characterised by brevity, giving an impression of transience, yet the language is less straightforward, weighed down as it is by its enigmatic philosophical resonances and implications. The form is dislocated in its yoking together of disparate allusions without reflecting any need to provide linking passages or explanation. Thus it often has the feel of utterance - an aspect perhaps enhanced by the italics of the text, relating to the text of the poems throughout an edition in which italics indicate direct speech, even if this



speech remains internalised, not uttered aloud. The texts are littered with dashes indicating interrupted thought, speech or line, again emphasising the dialogic nature of the text. It is clearly a series of many-voiced texts rather than a single introduction embodying a single perspective, and as the identities of the many speakers remain shadowy, no strain is overtly prioritised.

The fragments are either written in continuous prose or contain passages of prose within them. 'The Evangelistic Beasts' and 'Ghosts' consist of a single paragraph without line breaks of any kind. 'Fruits' contains one long paragraph (ending with an indication that the quotation is incomplete, or a continuation implied) followed by a shorter quotation in separate quotation marks, indented so as to indicate a new paragraph. The cases of 'Trees', 'Flowers', 'Creatures', 'Reptiles', 'Birds' and 'Animals' are rather different, and much more interesting. In these, prose chunks of varying lengths - sometimes as short as a single line - follow each other in quick succession, without paragraph indentations. Instead of indenting, Lawrence simply takes a new line for each quotation or remark, in the manner of a free-verse poem. Arguably these fragments push the free-verse form to its logical conclusion, expanding the lines to incorporate whole paragraphs and entire quotations: fragments are housed within fragments, juxtaposed so as to create a curious blend of poetry and prose.

'Flowers' provides the most striking example of this, and links most obviously to Lawrence's free-verse poetry: to *Last Poems* in particular. It begins as though it had already begun: 'AND long ago, the almond was the symbol of resurrection' <sup>16</sup> (this, although in quotation marks, appears to be

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<sup>16</sup> On 29 September 1929 Lawrence wrote to Maria Huxley, requesting 'a little brochure on *The Olive Tree* and *The Vine*' which might enable him to write 'essays on various trees... of the Mediterranean' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.501). She found an article on the almond tree which she has typed by Jehanne Moulaert and sent to Lawrence, who acknowledged it in a letter of 26 October: 'The typescript has just come, and thank you very much' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.541). Later still on 19 December he asked 'what Jehanne paid for the typing of that almond-tree article - so nice it is' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.602). For references to the almond trees at Bandol in January and February 1930 see Lawrence, 1993c, pp.633; 634; 646 and Brewster and Brewster, 1934, pp.228-29.



Lawrence). A line break follows, before another (unspecified) voice provides the material for potentially undermining or questioning the initial assertion: 'But tell me, tell me, why should the almond tree be the symbol of resurrection?' Suddenly, as readers, we are made aware of a second speaker - of a dialogue - emphasising that the extended free-verse form is conveying utterance. The voice questions with the same insistence evident in the line 'Tell me, is the gentian savage, at the top of its coarse stem?' in the poem 'Flowers and Men'. Although (in the *BirdsBeasts* fragment 'Flowers') a question is asked, it bears within itself the necessary response: it is a question that is not intended to raise doubts but to provoke an interest, so that the interest will be satisfied by the forthcoming explanation. Lawrence follows this second exhortation with 'Have you not seen, in the wild winter sun of the southern Mediterranean, in January and in February, the re-birth of the almond tree, all standing in clouds of glory?' This is unbroken prose: or, in the terms of my analysis, a line of free-verse poetry that has extended beyond normal bounds in order to incorporate the narrative description that provides the question with its force.

Again the question is answered by the inquisitive second-voice: 'Ah Yes! ah yes! would I might see it again!'. The response is appropriately effusive, and we acquire an impression of this speaker. S/he seems like the narrator of the 'God is Born!' poems, or of 'Red Geranium and Godly Mignonette', showing the necessary willingness to engage with and respond to the wonder of this cosmic/godly manifestation. The first speaker, prone to scholarly exegesis wrapped in the longer complexities of prose, expands and expounds as follows:

Yet even this is not the secret of the secret. Do you know what was called the almond bone, in the body, the last bone of the spine? This was the seed of the body, and from the grave it could grow into a new body again, like almond blossom in January. (Lawrence, 1930, p.41)

The second voice, capable as it seems of response but lacking in ancient wisdom, responds with '...No, no, I know nothing of that'. At this point in the poem the first set of quotation marks is closed, and Lawrence (unknown to Pinto and Roberts) turns to Burnet for two pre-Socratic quotations. The first dialogic exchange (up to '...No, no, I know nothing of that') is almost certainly all Lawrence's. It provides an appropriate context for the first poem in the section - 'Almond Blossom' - just as the opening of 'Fruits' introduces 'Pomegranates'. Lawrence's own contributions to the fragments are sometimes most evident when the prologue bears closest resemblance to the poems that will follow it or is most illuminating in relation to these poems.

The apparently odd shift from the first dialogue to the altered Empedoclean fragment 'Oh Persephone, Persephone, bring back to me from Hades the life of a dead man' is similarly explicable in terms of the second poem in the sub-section: 'Purple Anemones'. This poem, treating its subject matter flippantly and ironically unlike the later poem 'Bavarian Gentians', focuses on the pursuit of Persephone, the 'husband-snared hell queen', by Dis. The switch to another Empedocles quotation is slightly more problematic, and may be attributed, I think, to Lawrence's sense of amusement and his desire to include the particular quotation 'Wretches, utter wretches, keep your hands from beans! saith Empedokles'. Lawrence elaborates on the bean theme, adopting the scholarly voice evident in the first section of the poem:

...For according to some, the beans were the beans of votes, and votes were politics. But others say it was a food-taboo. Others also say the bean was one of the oldest symbols of the male organ, for the peas-cod is later than the beans-cod. (Lawrence, 1930, p.41)

It is difficult to tell how serious Lawrence is being here. Perhaps he felt the need to justify his inclusion of the 'bean' quotation, and finds a useful opportunity to attend to the male equivalent of the subject of the earlier 'fig' poem. The prologue ends with a 'quotation' that seems to be Lawrence rather than Burnet-text. It begins as though contradicting a previous assertion, then



reveals itself to be on a different tack, as though Lawrence were convincing his readers that he is quoting, and quoting without altering the original: 'But blood is red, and blood is life. Red was the colour of kings. Kings, far-off kings, painted their faces vermilion and were almost gods'. This quotation neatly refers to the remaining poems in the section: namely 'Sicilian Cyclamens' and 'Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers'. Its emphasis on red or vermilion (the colour of gods and heroes in *Last Poems*) links the 'tiny rose cyclamens' growing between the toes of shaggy Mediterranean savages with the 'Rosy, rosy scarlet' of the hibiscus and salvia flowers, saluted in preference to the 'loutish bolshevists' who presume to adopt the colour of these flowers and pin them on their breasts.

Although Pinto and Roberts fail in their task as Riffaterrean intertextualists they produce a text that has greater integrity than the *Phoenix* version. Their text does not conform exactly to the Cresset Press original: it alters the number of words printed in capitals at the opening of the fragments, it does not use italics to emphasise the fact that the text is dialogic, and omits almost all of the dashes which indicate fragmentation or interruption.<sup>17</sup> In 'Flowers', for instance, the following 'dashed' words appeared in the Cresset Press edition but were omitted in *Complete Poems*: 'Resurrection.-'; 'resurrection? -'; 'glory? -'; 'that. -' and 'man-.'. Yet in spite of these omissions, the text at least preserves the odd forms of the fragments, allowing Lawrence to retain the free-verse/prose amalgam that he feels appropriate for his new allusive style.

The *Phoenix* version, by contrast, is conspicuous, and reprehensible, in its deviation from Lawrence's form. The editor (E.D. McDonald) attempts to regularise or normalise the text by sorting it into neat paragraphs, sometimes joining lines together so the appearance is more consistent. 'Flowers' provides

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<sup>17</sup> Typists and printers in the early and mid 20th Century were loth to print dashes at the end of lines. This was strikingly evident in many of Lawrence's texts, none more so than in his play *The Daughter-in-Law*, in which over seventy dashes were excised in all from the two typescripts and from the text of the first edition.

a good example of this approach. To begin with, the first words are indented, so as to place them at the opening of a prose paragraph. Then, unlike Pinto and Roberts, McDonald refuses to take a new line for 'But tell me', thus failing to distinguish the second voice from the first. New paragraphs, with their first lines indented, are taken for 'Have you seen...'; 'Ah yes!' and 'Yet even', again losing the effect of a conversation or verbal exchange. There is no new line taken at all for the second speaker's final response to the first: 'No, no, I know nothing of that—', again confusing the identity of the two voices, who should be differentiated by the length of their rejoinders. Then, for the last three quotations McDonald inserts new paragraphs, indenting accordingly.

These changes may appear to be insignificant. Yet they reveal a lack of understanding of the text, and make crucial assumptions regarding editorial superiority; and the formal interest of Lawrence's text is forfeited when the process of regularisation occurs. A champion of regularised text might argue that Lawrence cared very little about these fragments, and the editor has taken the trouble to make these corrections: they might cite as evidence the letter in which Lawrence tells Hughes-Stanton that he might cheerfully burn the fragments if they are unsuitable. Yet the fragments do not exist in a stylistic vacuum: they are not the only texts that explore the possibilities of combining prose and free-verse in this way. The same kind of combinations are evident in the fragment 'Fire', which is arguably the last poem Lawrence ever wrote: later even than the *Last Poems* which are interpreted always as his final poetic statements.

*'Fire': last poem? Free-verse or prose-poetry?*

It is almost certain that the fragment 'Fire' was written after the *BirdsBeasts* prologues, and very likely that it succeeded all or almost all of the *Last Poems*. It can be located (although not with absolute certainty) in the period between Lawrence's completion of the *BirdsBeasts* prologues and his letter to Laurence



Pollinger of 25 November in which he requests the comprehensive inverted commas over which the baffled public must crack their wits. The poem can conjecturally be located between these dates as it seems to have coincided with the Brewsters' acquisition and decoration of their new house Chateau Brun, and with Lawrence's early visits to the new home. On 14 November Lawrence informed Max and Kathe Mohr that the Brewsters were to move in at the end of the week; then on 21 November in another letter to Max Mohr he gives the following account of the place:

The Brewsters have taken the Château Brun, and paid 1,200 francs for six months rent. Now the workmen are white-washing the inside, for 700 frs.—and Earl and Achsah are supposed to be painting the doors and windows, also white. The whole interior is to be snow-white, like a pure, pure lily: imaginez-vous, Monsieur, comme un tombeau! But Earl does not want to go to the house, he is afraid of being there all alone with his Achsah, so when they go to paint the doors, after an hour he has a head-ache, and must come home. I'm afraid it is going to be very difficult. — They have bought two old chairs and a set of fire-irons (for six frs) so far. I don't know how they'll ever really move in to the house: they really worry me.

(Lawrence, 1993c, p.570)

It is unclear whether or not Lawrence is writing this account having already visited the house, or whether he is merely relaying the Brewsters' description. He must have visited the house at around this time, however, as the Brewsters describe his presence there at the time of the initial painting:

One morning we all went by automobile to look at the new place, taking Lawrence with us. He pottered about and watched the painting and finally squatted on his heels by the fireplace, making a fire with twigs to dry the new colour-washed walls. He sat there feeding the fire with the bits of stick I carried in. Looking like a collier, he stayed all morning perched on his toes, elbows on knees. Frieda called out: 'Look at Lorenzo sitting on his heels. He always does it—just like a miner.' She seemed almost vain of his accomplishment. (Nehls, 1959, p.416)



The discrepancy between the reports offered by Lawrence and the Brewsters is interesting: while Lawrence emphasises the cold, tomb-like nature of the white-washed room the Brewsters refer to the literal and figurative warmth of the scene in which Lawrence crouches miner-fashion before the fire. They give another account which conveys the same impression, but this time includes a reference to the poem 'Fire', which Lawrence was allegedly writing at this time, in direct response to his experiences at the Château Brun:

He would sit contentedly by our hearth warming his feet and insisting that it was the first time during the winter that they had been warm. He declared that if he had the actual presence of a fire before him in his house, instead of *chauffage centrale*, he would gain new strength: for man lived by the elements and he should not deny fire. It was at this time that he wrote a poem to fire.

(Brewster and Brewster, 1934, pp.303-6) <sup>18</sup>

This reference to the 'Fire' poem is significant in two respects: it provides a specific context for the writing of the poem, and also shows that the poem was public at least to some extent: Lawrence either read the poem to the Brewsters

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<sup>18</sup> Tedlock gives the following information about the 'Fire' fragment: 'LIKE 'The Elephants of Dionysos' this text evidently dates from the period of composition of *Apocalypse*. The notebook from which the manuscript has been removed was a birthday gift from Harwood Brewster, and bears an inscription dated September 11, 1929. By late September Lawrence was in Bandol, Var, France, where *Apocalypse* was written in the next few months' (Tedlock, 1948, p.214). For more detailed information about the placing of 'Fire' and 'The Elephants of Dionysos' among notes and drafts of *Apocalypse*, as well as page size, see Tedlock, 1948, pp.212-13.

In *D.H. Lawrence: A Calendar of his Works*, Keith Sagar refers to the Brewster quotation above and uses the reference to the fire poem in order to date the fragment. However, he places the poem's composition at the end of December rather than in November, asserting that the Brewsters 'did not move into their new house at Bandol until late December' (Sagar, 1979, p.189). The fragment was initially drafted on the back of sheets of *Apocalypse* - 'A manuscript... containing notes for *Apocalypse* also contains "The Elephants of Dionysos" and "Fire"' - and Sagar uses his argument that Lawrence 'began writing *Apocalypse*' in December to support his dating of the fragments. It seems likely, however, that Lawrence began writing *Apocalypse* before this - in mid-November, when Carter arrived - which means that the fragments may be a month earlier than Sagar supposes. As far as the Brewsters are concerned, they were certainly paying regular visits to their new house and having the white-washing done long before the beginning of December, let alone the end. Lawrence thought they would move in at the end of the week of 14 November, and on 21 was giving vivid descriptions of the painting taking place.



or talked about it. Significantly, too, it is referred to as a 'poem' about fire, although it is, in fact, a prose poem - something rare in Lawrence's output - and is not included in *Complete Poems*. The poem differs from the *BirdsBeasts* prologues in that the language is less obviously mimetic, and it does not have the same tissue of enigmatic allusions. Yet it is richly allusive - more subtly, more poetically and less dogmatically so - while preserving a simplicity of language that has been evident in the *Last Poems*. This poem bridges the gap between the *Last Poems* style and the new form of the fragments, creating a hybrid that is both appropriate for its content and innovatory, just as it seems (in terms of the date of its composition) to belong to the transition period (mid-November 1929) between the writing of *Last Poems* and *Apocalypse*.

The poem seems to have been provoked by the awareness of 'real' fire by contrast with the artificial, unelemental nature of 'chauffage centrale'. It begins with a narrative voice reminiscent of the first speaker in 'Flowers' and of the punchy, down-to-earth style of *Pansies*, launching into an interrogative:

Fire: did you ever warm your hands at  
the combustion of carbon and oxygen,  
or glow in the face from the formation  
of carbon dioxide by means of combustion?  
(Lawrence, MS4, p.1)<sup>19</sup>

The question is not answered but followed by a series of questions intermingled with images that combine and proliferate. The first is:

What do you see there, then, as the  
twigs crackle and the gold rushes out  
and ripples flapping brilliant to  
a peak of gold within the smoke?  
(Lawrence, MS4, p.1)

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<sup>19</sup> For a published version of this text see Smailes 1970, pp.42-6.

These first two 4-line 'sentences' of the poem are juxtaposed in order to create a contrast between the inappropriately 'scientific' method of creating heat and the sensory response. They reflect the assertion made by Lawrence (according to the Brewsters) that he has never really been warm in a centrally-heated house, but has become warm at their fire.

Tedlock, in his description of the MS, quotes the four lines above and comments: 'The rest of the sketch is a poetic answer to this question, ending somewhat in the form of an invocation' (Tedlock, 1948, p.214). In Powell's MS listings it is given the title 'Invocation to Fire' (Powell, 1937, p.55): and even though this is an imposed title (Lawrence's sketch was untitled, except for the word 'Fire' printed followed by a colon at the beginning of the poem's first line) it seems appropriate, and emphasises the 'poetic' status of the fragment. Just as in 'Invocation to the Moon' in which the goddess is addressed as 'You beauty, O you beauty', so fire here is invoked and addressed as an animate force: 'Oh lovely Fire, what / is it but you, lovely Fire, that / was not, and is, to my joy'. The request to Fire 'I only ask that / you shall be with me, bright, rustling, / fierce-fanged fire' is also strikingly similar to the equivalent lines in the moon poem: 'Be good to me, lady, great lady of the nearest / heavenly mansion, and last!'. Similarly the next line of 'Fire': 'I only delight in / your companionship that is nakeder / and more interpenetrating than love' correlates with the description of the moon-goddess who is the 'greatest of ladies' 'because naked you are more wonderful than anything we can stroke-'.

Like the moon invocation 'Fire' uses repetition to achieve an incantatory, rhapsodic or mesmeric effect. The repetitions of 'Oh lovely' achieve this effect, as in the poem 'The Man of Tyre', in which the words 'Oh lovely, lovely' are used to express the wonder and rapture of the man who watches a woman he identifies as Aphrodite emerge from the water. Similarly towards the end of the poem the phrase 'beautiful fire, / beautiful fire' - like 'it is warm, it is warm' in 'Butterfly' - conveys something of the comfort derived from close proximity with this elemental source of heat, which is itself a



wonder. A sense of urgency, of a need to establish contact and provoke response is also achieved by reiterated words, such as 'Oh pour, pour, pour into the vessels of my heart', like the repetitions of 'O build' and 'O build it' in 'The Ship of Death'.

The imagery as well as style links this poem to a variety of Lawrentian descriptions used previously both in poetry and prose. Fire 'lies red' in a kind of dormant potency like the serpent that lies coiled at the base of the spine. It then 'writhes a little', implying motion like that of the Lawrentian snake which 'writhed like lightning and was gone' (Lawrence, 1993a, p.351). This fire does not disappear however but 'changes upon itself', the quality of metamorphosis linking it with such poems as 'Change' and particularly 'Phoenix'. The Phoenix allusion becomes more explicit through the words: 'I ask not how / you nest and crackle so red, / with pinions of swift gold, among / the moving transfigured twigs!' as well as the description of fire as 'swift, swift ruddy one, feathered with / gold'. Perhaps there is an implication of fire's destructive quality - or perhaps simply its power - in the description of it as 'swift...one', relating it to the thunderers or sunderers of *Last Poems* (see Lawrence, MS2, pp.17-18; 1993a, pp.709-10). Yet the Phoenix resonance is most prominent, and the poem's vision is one implying (if not directly asserting) a kind of rebirth or transfiguration through the change that fire can occasion: 'Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest / with strands of down like floating ash / shows that she is renewing her youth like the eagle, / immortal bird'. Fire no doubt also possesses the Heraclitean potency: 'All things are an exchange for Fire, and Fire for all things' and 'Fire in its advance will judge and convict all things' (Burnet, 1920, p.135).

According to the pre-Socratic insight, fire must co-exist with the wet: with ocean. Appropriately then, fire takes on liquid properties and becomes wine which will pour into the poet's chilled heart: 'Oh pour, pour, pour into / the vessels of my heart, run in through the branched hands...'. The poet craves

a baptism of fire through metamorphosis or assimilation, and the parallel is striking with the poem 'Mana of the Sea' in which the poet asks:

Have I caught from it  
the tide in my arms  
that runs down to the shallows of my wrists, and breaks  
abroad in my hands, like waves among the rocks of substance?...

And is my body ocean, ocean  
whose power runs to the shores along my arms  
and breaks in the foamy hands, whose power rolls out  
to the white-treading waves of two salt feet?

(Lawrence, MS2, p.15; 1993a, p.705)

The image of wine/ocean switches to one of delicate, external contact, in which fire will 'hover like a butterfly ruddy on the cheeks that were chill, pulsing them with brilliant warmth'. It is perhaps this butterfly reference, evoking the invocatory 'Butterfly' poem, that inspires the warmth/frost and inside/outside dichotomies at the end of the poem. This contrast is already latent in 'Fire', in the earlier reference to 'Oh / lovely fire on this chill day, as / the sun goes down': as though the sun-lion had again licked its paws in readiness to depart and given way to the moon. The fire takes effect 'in / this twilight, now the sun has gone / and the blue shadow is thinking of / hoar-frost, outside the house'. Again the sense of being 'before the fire' is contrasted with the sense of coldness and the unknown outside and beyond. The blue shadow is not only the light reflecting on snow as described in 'Anaxagoras'; it also harbours something of the threat or strangeness of the unknown conveyed in 'The Flying-Fish' in the description of 'the other sun shaking its dark blue wings' (Lawrence, 1983b, p.209). Yet the 'Fire' poem ends positively, with affirmation, and not merely the wistful acceptance of 'it is enough'. Instead it ends 'But I / am before the fire, and my heart / is open'.

The line-break indications I have used derive from those indicated in the Lawrence manuscript, and reproduced by T.A. Smailes, who prints 'Fire' in an article entitled 'D.H. Lawrence: Seven Hitherto Unpublished Poems'. In his



text the fragment is lineated clearly as a poem, with lines shorter and more uniform in length than is habitual in Lawrence's free-verse poetry. Keith Sagar prints the fragment very differently in his *Selected Poems* edition of 1972 as a block of prose, assuming that the line-divisions are unintentional. He refers to the two 'prose-poems' 'The Elephants of Dionysus' and 'Fire' and is contemptuous of what he sees as Smailes' versifying of the text: "'Fire" is also published in Smailes, but incorrectly, as verse' (Sagar, 1979, p.189). It is evident from Lawrence's manuscript that the line-breaks are determined at least in part by the width of the page. However, it could be argued that there is integrity in Smailes' decision to reproduce the manuscript faithfully, allowing the reader to make his/her own decisions regarding Lawrence's intentions.

If Lawrence, as Smailes implies, had specific reasons for lineating the poem as he does, it is necessary to consider possible reasons for this. He may have wished to prioritise certain words by placing them at line endings or beginnings, such as the reiterated question 'What is it...?' or the words 'writhes', 'fierce-fanged', 'swift', 'gold', 'brilliant' and 'beautiful'. The last line of the poem is shortened to two words, and thus invested with simplicity and directness. The poem as a whole seems to use free-verse in a way that differs from and extends Lawrence's previous writing: the style is less restricted than ever, combining naturalistic speech-rhythms used in prose with poetic imagery. It eludes artifice of form and remains fluid, yet manages to incorporate the repetitions and modulations characteristic above all of *Last Poems*. Sagar, by making the text into prose, fails, like Edward McDonald in his printing of the *BirdsBeasts* prologues, to accept Lawrence on his own experimental terms.

Sagar is certainly wrong in classing 'Fire' with 'The Elephants of Dionysus' simply as a prose poem, for the two pieces of writing seem to be utterly different stylistically. If the *Phoenix* text of 'Elephants' is to be trusted - Tedlock says 'The text in *Phoenix* follows that of the manuscript' (Tedlock, 1948, p.213) - 'Elephants' has a conventionally paragraphed prose form and

gives a chronological narrative account, rather than capturing a descriptive moment through poetic invocation. It begins as follows:

Dionysus, returning from India a victor with his hosts, met the Amazons once more towards the Ephesian coasts. O small-breasted, brilliant Amazons, will you never leave off attacking the Bull-foot, for whom the Charites weave ivy-garlands? Garlands and flutes. Oh, listen to the flutes! Oh, draw near, there is going to be a sacrifice to the god of delight! (Lawrence, 1936, p.59)

This paragraph is representative of the whole text, beginning as it does with narrative account, before launching into a series of exhortations, characterised (in the entire text) by the exclamations 'Oh', 'O', 'lo', and 'Ah'. The fragment seems to differ from 'Fire' in that its principal aim is to tell a story, employing an ancient style that incorporates utterance traditionally associated with poetry. While 'Fire' is a poem that incorporates prose-techniques, 'Elephants' is a piece of prose that incorporates poetry. While 'Fire' resembles an expanded free-verse poem, 'Elephants' resembles a contracted short story.

'Fire' retains a pre-Socratic flavour through its celebration of elemental fire, and through the conscious archaisms - terms such as 'pinions', 'whence' and 'whither' that contrast refreshingly with the scientific references to 'carbon dioxide' and 'combustion'. It seems an odd hybrid stylistically: a cross between the *BirdsBeasts* prologues; the free-verse form of *Last Poems*; even the short prose section style of *Apocalypse*. It is impossible to ascertain Lawrence's purpose for this little poem: whether or not it was just a one-off form chosen as appropriate for a particular description, or whether it marked the onset of what would have been a new wave of creativity: another kind of writing. Returning to Lipking's notion of a harmonium, this fragment links oddly with the short piece of writing by Keats (also left untitled, but usually referred to as 'This living hand') quoted and discussed by Lipking in his final chapter:

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold



And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd - see here it is -  
I hold it towards you.

(Keats, 1988, p.459)

Images of warmth and chill, of pulsing or streaming life in contrast with icy silence or hoar-frost, suggest a possible link between the two pre-death poems. Ironically Lawrence referred to the white-washed house of the Brewsters - the very house warmed by the fire he evokes in his poem - as a 'tombeau' in his letter to Max Mohr (although he may simply be echoing an overheard remark in describing it as such). Lawrence's words 'But for me, oh again I am a wine-cup, and my chill heart is empty of wine' seem to demand the same sort of transferral of life to him from another that is requested in Keats' fragment. It may relate, also, to Keats' lines: 'O, for a draught of vintage!' and 'O for a beaker full of the warm South' expressed in a poem where the narrator wants escape from a world in which 'youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies'.

These are not parallels I wish to emphasise, however, as they seem to fall into Lipking's trap of classifying and analysing texts in terms of their biographical implications, which emphasise that these are pre-death poems and must be seen as such. The Lawrence and Keats texts link more interestingly in that we are entirely unaware of their function or destination. Lipking says of 'This living hand':

No one can say exactly when or why these lines were written. Indeed, we cannot say with any certainty even that Keats meant them to be a poem. Jotted in the manuscript of his faery burlesque, *The Jealousies* (or *Cap and Bells*), and thus presumably dating from the end of 1819, they were not published until 1898; nor is there any indication that the author thought them complete or fit for the press.

(Lipking, 1981, p.181)

Keats jotted this fragment down on an apparently unrelated literary MS, just as Lawrence scribbled 'Fire' onto note-sheets for *Apocalypse*. 'This living hand' might have been meant as a poem in its own right; it may have had been intended for a dramatic role, in which it would emerge from the mouth of a particular character; it might have been intended solely for Fanny Brawne: Lipking discusses all these possibilities. He identifies the fragment as a piece of writing that gives us as readers a 'rare feeling of intimacy', 'for once Keats speaks directly to us without formality or mask' (Lipking, 1981, p.181)<sup>20</sup>. Christopher Pollnitz suggests, as I have indicated earlier, that the reading and deciphering of Lawrence's draft versions of *Last Poems* gives us an intimacy of this kind.

Yet this sense of intimacy is bound up with the critics' awareness of his poet's impending death: Pollnitz emphasises the 'cough-prints' evident on the *Last Poems* MS that give us a poignant contact with the illness that was to kill Lawrence shortly after. Lipking, even while identifying an incompleteness in the writing of Keats' enigmatic poetry fragment has to formulate an alternative vision in which a snug coherence can be provided by the reader of such a fragment:

That is why the fragment fits so snugly at the end of Keats' poems: to emphasize that the process of his work can never be completed save by our own responsive acts of attention. (Lipking, 1981, p.183)

It is interesting that he chooses the Lawrentian phrase 'act[s] of attention' to formulate his sense of reader-response - or reader-responsibility - rather than the act of writing itself. His view here rests on an acceptance of the co-authorship in which reader and writer interact in the intertextual process. Still, however, he is attempting to override his own real insight: that poets do not and cannot shape their poetic careers. If Keats or Lawrence had lived a month or two longer there would have been still more 'last' texts, all of them probably

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<sup>20</sup> This seems wishful thinking on Lipking's part.



suggesting new directions or fresh starts. Terms such as 'shaping' and 'summation' are never satisfactory in defining either the makings of a life or of a poem: the complexity of such processes belie and elude definition. 'Fire' which could be referred to as Lawrence's last poem - if we wished to give it that significance - expresses his wish to remain free from questioning, shaping and the awareness of an end, in order to live:

I ask not how nor whence nor  
whither, for if I ask I shall only  
answer myself with a thousand  
damp equivocations.

...Elude, then, elude their cold  
and mean little questions, these  
pale-lipped bespectacled men!

...But I  
am before the fire, and my heart  
is open.

(Lawrence, MS4, pp.2-3)

The word 'open' works powerfully against all the implications of 'closure' which the 'lastness' of the poem invites, even though, paradoxically, it achieves a kind of poetic closure at the end of this poem. It reveals an optimism that suggests beginnings rather than endings. In January Lawrence wrote to Mabel Dodge Luhan 'I wish we could start afresh with this year' (Lawrence, 1993c, p.616): an aspiration like that of Tennyson's Ulysses, yearning to set out. If Lawrence had been given this opportunity, as he was after *Collected Poems*, the new year would no doubt have given rise to a new phase of living and writing: to a literal journey, and to another kind of poetry.

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- MS2 Notebook (Roberts E192) held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, containing the poems written between late September and mid November 1929, and published as 'Last Poems' by Richard Aldington in 1932.
- MS3 Unpublished early draft (Roberts E382B) of the 'Whitman' essay written in 1919 and later printed in revised form in *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Will be available in full for the first time in the impending Cambridge edition of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, eds. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen, 1999.
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